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**‘Why vote for a fake *kinnar* when
you can vote for a real one?’
Representation and Political Identity among *Kinnars*
in Madhya Pradesh, India**

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*Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Study of Religions
2013*

Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines the production of *kinnar* identity in the context of state politics in Madhya Pradesh. As a subordinate group, living on the margins of history, religion, gendered practice, and the social imagination, *kinnars* (or *hijras*) are often represented to and by the public as an impoverished and deviant group, who fail to fit into mainstream society. The election of seven *kinnars* in the state of Madhya Pradesh between 1999 and 2009 provided an opportunity for *kinnars* to be represented in a new way to the public, both in Madhya Pradesh and nationally. Their electoral victories and tenures paralleled a wider theme in respect to the entry of previously marginalised individuals into deliberative and legislative bodies, usually of lower-caste status, with the aim of gaining legitimation and formal recognition of their identity. In this thesis, I explore the relationship between representation and the production of *kinnar* identity in modern India. I analyse how *kinnars* and their supporters constructed *kinnar* identity as a viable, political identity, negotiating and narrating a new representation of their idiosyncratic bodies and behaviours. I argue that political participation was not beneficial for *kinnar* politicians, in the sense that they obtained few, if any, ostensible material or symbolic gains. Moreover, the case of these *kinnars*' participation raises wider questions regarding marginal identity and recognition by the Indian State. Throughout the thesis, I explore how *kinnar* identity is located on the margins of various societal arenas and how entry into and representation within central spaces entails a significant negotiation and re-presentation of *kinnar* identity. I argue that modes of recognition fix individuals within an identity that is intelligible to the Indian State but fail to contain the heterogeneous forms of *kinnar* identity, forcing *kinnars* to identify in a particular way in order to be recognised.

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Conventions and Orthography

Transliteration Conventions

All Hindi words have been transliterated in this thesis using the English Roman script and are consistently italicised. All Hindi language transliteration is based on the modern form of transliteration used in R. S. McGregor's *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (1993). Spellings of deity names and names of individuals from classical Hindi texts have been obtained from W. J. Johnson's *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (2009). Words from Tamil have been transliterated according to the scheme adopted in the Syndicate of the University of Madras' *Tamil Lexicon* (1982).

Notes on Style

1. Unless indicated otherwise, emphasis within quotations is found in the original.
2. When discussing a specific author, I adopt their spellings and transliterated terms.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AC/DC	man who is both 'passive' and 'active' is same-sex sexual relations; refers to an appliance that works on both alternating and direct current
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Janshakti Party
CBO	community-based organisation
HIV / AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IAS	Indian Administrative Services
IPC	Indian Penal Code
LBG	Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MIC	Mayor-in-Council; council supporting mayor in Municipal Corporation
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MSM	'men who have sex with men' or 'males who have sex with males' (to account for males who do not identify as men)
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NACP	National AIDS Control Programme
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PRIs	<i>Pañcāyatī Rāj</i> (rural level governance) institutions
PUCL-K	People's Union for Civil Liberties of Karnataka
SC	Scheduled Caste
SRS	sex reassignment surgery
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TG	transgender
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	Uttar Pradesh

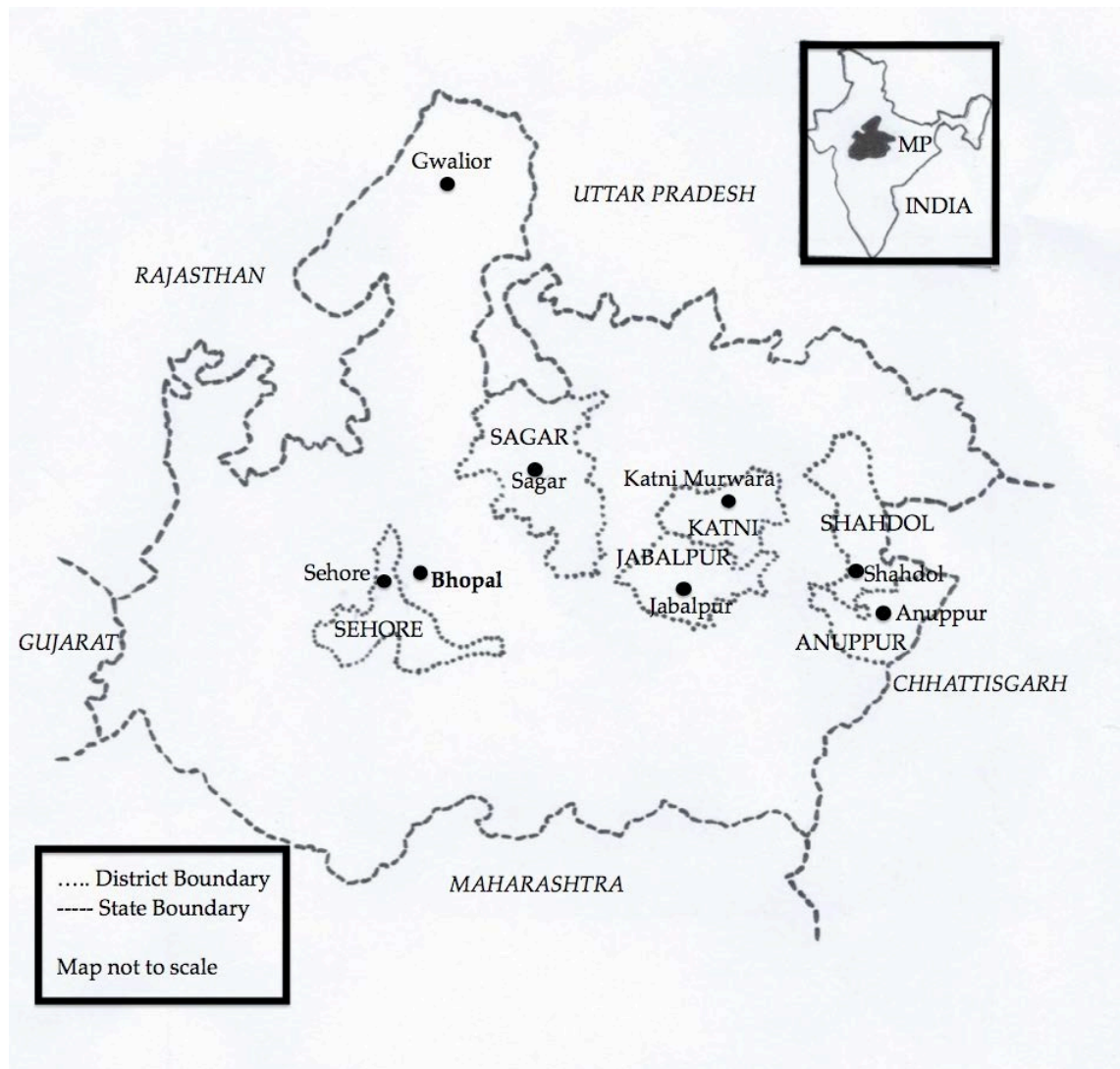
Glossary

<i>ali</i>	alternative term for <i>hijra</i> (Tamil Nadu)
<i>aravaṇi</i>	alternative term for <i>hijra</i> (Tamil Nadu)
<i>ardhanārīśvara</i>	epithet and form of Śiva; literally ‘lord who is half woman’
<i>āśrama</i>	Hindu life stage, dictating behaviour
<i>badhā</i>	payment for and ritual work itself; performing blessings
<i>bahin</i>	sister
<i>berūpia</i>	both active and passive role in same-sex, sexual intercourse; ‘people of a different form or face’ (Reddy 2005)
<i>beṭi</i>	daughter
<i>bhāt</i>	cooked rice; a wedding ceremony
<i>bindī</i>	forehead mark of Hindu married women, used aesthetically by <i>hijras</i>
<i>būā</i>	paternal aunt
<i>burqā</i>	black dress and veil worn by Muslim women
<i>cāṭla</i>	sari
<i>celā</i>	disciple
<i>chakkā</i>	slang word for a <i>hijra</i> , literally ‘six’
‘chibry’	<i>hijra</i> without a penis, after emasculation (Hossain 2012)
crore	unit of measurement; 10 million
<i>dāi</i>	midwife
<i>dādī</i>	paternal grandmother
<i>dargāh</i>	mausoleum
<i>dīdī</i>	elder sister
<i>dūdh</i>	milk
<i>dupaṭṭā</i>	scarf worn with <i>śalvār qamīz</i>
<i>gāṇḍu</i>	a term derived from <i>gāṇḍ</i> (ass): ‘one who uses his ass’; pejorative (Reddy 2005)
<i>gharānā</i>	family, lineage (Delhi)
<i>grām</i>	village (unit of rural governance)
<i>grām sabhā</i>	rural form of decentralised government, requires full village participation
<i>grām pañcāyat</i>	rural form of decentralised government of elected representatives
<i>guru</i>	spiritual guide; teacher; <i>hijra</i> leader
<i>halāl</i>	that which is allowed; in regards to meat, from ritually sacrificed animals
<i>hijragiri</i>	collecting alms and performing <i>badhā</i> (Hossain 2012)
<i>izzat</i>	honour (Reddy 2005)

<i>‘janana’</i>	<i>hijra</i> with a penis (Hossain 2012)
<i>janpad</i>	block (unit of rural governance)
<i>jātivihīn</i>	caste-less
<i>jogin</i>	form of <i>koti</i> ; ascetic worshipper; ritually married to goddess (also jogappa; Reddy 2005)
<i>kaḍa-cāṭla</i>	form of <i>koti</i> ; non sari-wearing; not linked to <i>hijra</i> kinship structure (Reddy 2005)
<i>kalaśa</i>	ritual vase used in <i>śobhāyātrā</i> and other Hindu worship
<i>kāndra hijra</i>	‘sex-worker <i>hijra</i> ’ (Reddy 2005, as opposed to <i>badhāi hijras</i>)
<i>khāndān</i>	lineage, family (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>koti</i>	‘man’: ‘effeminate’; passive role in same-sex, sexual intercourse
<i>lakh</i>	unit of measurement; 100,000
<i>liṅgām</i>	‘mark’, ‘sign’; a representation of Śiva (phallus)
<i>luṅgī</i>	cloth worn around the waist
<i>mā</i>	mother
<i>mausī</i>	maternal aunt
<i>maṭkā</i>	earthen pot
<i>mukti</i>	salvation
<i>namāz</i>	daily prayers (Muslim)
<i>nānī</i>	maternal grandmother
<i>napuṃsak</i>	grammatical third gender; literally ‘neuter’
<i>nāran</i>	woman
<i>nāyak</i>	leader in <i>hijra</i> community or household
<i>nirvāṇ</i>	‘spiritual rebirth’; name given to emasculation operation
<i>paan</i>	preparation of betel leaf with areca nut and tobacco; to be chewed
<i>panti</i>	‘man’: ‘masculine’; active role in same-sex, sexual intercourse
<i>pūjā</i>	Hindu ritual of worship
<i>śalvār qamīz</i>	loose top garment and trousers worn by women
<i>‘sadrālī’</i>	‘real’ <i>hijra</i> (Hossain 2012)
<i>sammelan</i>	inter-regional gathering
<i>sannyāsī</i>	renouncer or ascetic
<i>śobhāyātrā</i>	procession at the end of a <i>sammelan</i>
<i>śiva-sati</i>	form of <i>koti</i> , possessed by Śiva (Reddy 2005)
<i>tālī</i>	hand clap, used in specific ways by <i>hijras</i>
<i>tapas</i>	process of generating ascetic heat and product
<i>tahsīl</i>	district
<i>tahsīldār</i>	subcollector of the District Revenue Department
<i>tirunaṅkai</i>	‘auspicious woman’; alternative term for <i>hijra</i> (Tamil Nadu)
<i>tritīya prakṛti</i>	literally ‘third sex’

<i>ustād</i>	‘teacher’; used for <i>hijra</i> household leaders (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>zenāna</i>	male <i>koti</i> ; female mannerisms and gestures; not linked to <i>hijra</i> kinship structure (Reddy 2005)
<i>zilā</i>	district (unit of rural governance)

Map of Madhya Pradesh



Introduction

Kamla Bua was elected as the mayor of the Municipal Corporation of Sagar city in Madhya Pradesh in December 2009. First-time candidates win seats all the time in the vast field of Indian politics, with new actors frequently elected from the level of the village to the national level. What was remarkable about Kamla's election was the fact that Kamla is a *kinnar*, or *hijrā*,¹ a member of the subordinate '*hijra*' community, categorised in multiple ways, but most frequently as 'eunuchs' or 'transgenders' by the Indian State and national media.² Kamla's victory was the most recent election of a 'eunuch' in Madhya Pradesh and the seventh victory since 1999. The Mayoral seat in Sagar city is always reserved for a member of the Scheduled Castes, alternating between reservations for men or women from one term to the next. In the 2009 election, the position was reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman. On the nomination form there was a box marked 'Caste' with three choices available: 'Scheduled Caste', 'Scheduled Tribe', and 'Other Backward Class'. Kamla did not choose any of these options but instead wrote '*jātivihīn kinnar*' or 'caste-less *kinnar*'. In so doing, she identified as an individual 'without' caste, as a '*kinnar*' who did not fit into these caste categories. She went on to win the election but only served two years of the five-year term. In December 2011 she was unseated by the Sagar District Court which ruled that she had not sufficiently proved her 'Scheduled Caste' status and thus her election was void.

Kamla's attempt to self-identify and the failure of current reservation categories—devised on the grounds of caste—to account for the marginality of her status as a *kinnar* introduces the main question for this thesis: what is the relation between representation and the construction of *kinnar* identity in modern India? Kamla identified in a way that did not meet the usual classification required in order to stand for a reserved seat. Accordingly, her status was not recognised by the State, despite the reality of her subordinate status. How an individual may identify can be at odds with the way the State recognises—or chooses to recognise—its subjects, and this reveals a failure of categories that are constructed in order to identify and to benefit different subject groups whose marginalisation is politically at stake. Kamla's unseating indicates an oversight by the Indian State, since it failed to recognise that *kinnars* are a subordinate and politically marginalised community, who, through daily discrimination and social violence, deserve equal protections and opportunities that

¹ According to transliteration conventions, the correct English spellings are '*kinnar*' and '*hijrā*'. For the thesis, I adopt '*kinnar*' and '*hijra*' (without diacritics) for easier reading.

² The term '*hijra*' is used widely throughout India; in Madhya Pradesh, the preferred term is '*kinnar*' and is used by local communities. *Kinnars* say it is an 'older' and more 'respectful' term, rather than '*hijra*' which they see as derogatory (on the term as an 'abusive epithet', see Hall 1995: 156; 1997: 442-6). Throughout the thesis, I adopt the terms that individuals use to describe themselves, primarily '*kinnar*' in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and '*hijra*' in Mumbai and Delhi and to describe the wider 'community' across India.

are afforded other caste groups conventionally seen as marginal. Although the Indian State has made efforts to plan and implement policies to address the very real inequalities that are consequent of *hijras'* low social identity, these efforts begin by defining a certain figuration of what a *hijra* subject is or might be. For individuals from marginalised communities, representation is crucial in order to gain rights and benefits. However, the way in which individuals identify is often incommensurate with formal categories that are recognised and sanctioned by the State, rendering that identity unintelligible to State mechanisms. Moreover, positing a particular form of identity as normative and intelligible might close down the heterogeneity inherent in the subject group.

I explore the question of representation in reference to the two related but discontinuous forms of representation theorised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak questions the inherent contradictions in the practice of representation, based on the subject who speaks 'for' and 'as', presenting themselves as a singular or homogenous entity, even though the person who represents is 'always a multiplicity' (2000: 1432), the product of different configurations of discourses (1985: 341). She distinguishes between representation as, on the one hand, 'speaking for', in the sense attributed to political proxy, and on the other, as re-presentation, as in the sense of making a portrait in art or philosophy. I adopt Spivak's theorisations and explore both forms of representation through three case studies of political participation of *kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh (hereafter MP). I explore how *kinnars* represented or spoke 'for' their constituents, as political proxies, and simultaneously spoke 'as', represented by both themselves and the mainstream public as candidates who were a better alternative to professional politicians who were perceived as corrupt and inefficient. *Kinnars* were elected by constituents who were disillusioned with mainstream parties and politicians and were thus represented as able to represent voters' better through their inherent difference from professional politicians, as lacking a party agenda and personal needs, as incorruptible, and more likely to serve their constituents' interests. Representational practices such as signs, symbols, rhetoric, and narratives surrounding *kinnars'* campaigns and elections produced a reinterpretation of what *kinnar* identity was, both in relation to the political sphere and outside this sphere. I argue that *kinnar* identity was reconstructed through and by local political discourse and demonstrate that *kinnar* identity was both represented and re-presented, in order to produce a political candidate who appealed to voters from a variety of social groups and networks. Commonly held stereotypes about *kinnars* were manipulated for political ends, presenting a specific version of what *kinnar* identity was expected to be, which had an impact, more generally, on how *kinnars* were viewed. The construction of a specific version of *kinnar* identity, circulated through discourses about political *kinnars*, produced a normative and intelligible form of *kinnar* identity for the voting public,

despite the heterogeneous range of identities collated under the term '*kinnar*' or '*hijra*', which precludes the forms of representation available. My analysis of the production of *kinnar* identity through the case studies of political participation in MP demonstrates the intersecting axes of state mechanisms, politics, and mainstream society, and their impact on the construction and production of individual identity.

Representation in local deliberative and legislative bodies,³ in the case of the *kinnar* community of MP, failed to represent local communities and individuals within them adequately through the institution of a specific form of *kinnar* identity. Political representation for marginalised communities can have positive functions, including symbolic, expressive, and educative functions due to the increased presence of minority groups in political and legislative bodies. In the Indian context, certain groups have guaranteed privileges and opportunities on the basis of their caste status. Similarly, measures implemented to benefit *hijras* could have advantages for many in the community. But this is only half of the story. Representation might be beneficial in symbolic and material ways, but does not ensure that previously marginalised groups gain a status that is considered normative. In fact, efforts to ensure recognition might reinforce marginal identity in other ways. State recognition of an identity, rendering it intelligible to State mechanisms and the mainstream public, aligns that identity with pre-existent normative categories and recognisable modes of interpretation. Representation, through engagement with the law and State mechanisms, has the ability to 'de-radicalise' the subaltern subject, producing and regulating them through normative modes of identification and expected behaviour (see Kapur 2009). The subject is rendered intelligible through a process of normalisation. As Spivak posits, it is the non-narrativisable nature of the subaltern that makes subjects subaltern, where their acts cannot be framed within modes of interpretation (1990: 144). Mechanisms to ensure representation cement a particular form of identity and absorb that form within a pre-constructed mode of civic intelligibility. In relation to their political participation, I argue that representation served to reinforce *kinnar* identity by focusing on the very aspects that made the group marginal within mainstream society, ironically, at the very

³ The term 'local bodies' refers to state (MP) level and regional level democratic institutions. I use the terms 'deliberative and legislative' to refer to democratic institutions that focus on legislation and deliberation, which are key to producing decentralised, democratic processes. There are three levels of 'local' governance in Madhya Pradesh. The Legislative Assembly (or Vidhan Sabha), based in Bhopal, forms part of the State Government of MP and is the legislative branch of the government. It consists of 230 elected representatives from single-seat constituencies. Urban local bodies consist of municipal corporations, municipal councils, and nagar parishads (city councils). The distinction between these bodies is based upon the number of the local population. Rural governance is based on the *Pañcāyatī Rāj* system and functions on three levels: *grām* (village), *janpad* (block), and *zila* (district). Urban local and *Pañcāyatī Rāj* institutions (PRIs) were formalised through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) and implemented in MP soon after the amendments, to aid development and improve administration through the decentralisation of power and resources (see Behar 1999; Goel and Rajneesh 2003). Significantly, state, urban, and rural institutions maintain quotas for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backwards Castes, and women in order to increase representation of marginalised groups.

moment that *kinnars* sought to enter a sphere of civil society. Marginality extends to multiple areas of *kinnars'* lives, including gender and sexual performance, religious identity, and even grassroots activism in modern India. This marginality was brought into political discourse and reified as a core aspect of their identity, reinforcing the marginality that political participation ostensibly had the potential to eradicate. Moreover, modes of identity that were non-narrativisable, such as identity and status within *hijra* society and heterogeneous identifications that seem paradoxical according to mainstream norms, remained uninterpreted, such that specific aspects of *kinnar* identity were rendered intelligible at the expense of others.

I consider the main academic contribution of this thesis to be as follows. First, the thesis contributes further data to literature on *hijra* identity, which is not an extensive area of study, particularly on communities in many states in India (including Madhya Pradesh). Work has largely been confined to the South and focuses on gender and religious practices. My investigation amongst the *kinnar* community in MP supplements existing literature on *hijra* communities in modern India. Second, a focus on political participation, in state politics in MP and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) activism in India (in Chapter Five), engages with current ways in which *hijra* identity is being renegotiated in the Indian context. *Hijras* are often perceived as outside of and unwilling to engage with mainstream society. Whilst this is true to an extent, there are numerous and significant attempts to enter mainstream spaces made by *hijras* and *kinnars* across India and this thesis assesses the impact that representation within mainstream political spheres has had on *hijra* identity. Third, I address how minority group identity is shaped through an engagement with democratic and State processes. Recognition by the State is necessary in order to acquire benefits and representation, as a result of political participation and activism, has the potential to redress the manifold inequalities *hijras* experience. At the same time, representation functions to reify certain aspects of identity, and I offer a theorisation of the effect of recognition by democratic and State processes on a minority identity. I explore specific mechanisms of political participation in MP and Indian LGBT activism that construct *hijra* identity in modern India and consider how they fail, ultimately, at constructing an identity that makes any claim to normativity.

I. Preliminary Literature Review

Scholarship on the *hijras* has focused on their sexual or gendered identity, structure and function of communities, and religious practices. However, there has been little written on *hijras* and their engagement with democratic processes. There is, of course, an established body of scholarship on the relationship between caste and democratic politics, as well as research into the role of women and political movements and

participation in India. Yet, there has been a lack of research on *hijras* and their political participation in the study of political praxis in India, except for one article by Gayatri Reddy (2003), which questions the presumed relationship between *hijra* marginalisation and their social emancipation through electoral participation. Despite the potential of creating a new understanding of citizenship and sexual representation, Reddy argues that identification with regulatory Hindu norms allows for the legitimisation of far-right moral agendas that intend to 're-masculinise' the nation. Given that *hijras* are not a formal caste group, or a gender recognised as 'equal' to male and female, their political practices have not been researched in relation to literature on caste and politics or gender and politics. The *hijras* are uniquely positioned with respect to their political participation, as an 'unrecognised' social grouping on the grounds of caste and by having a gender identity that does not conform to normative stereotypes of men or women in politics. An analysis of *hijra* participation in politics, therefore, has the potential to open up new avenues for conceptualising the functions of social grouping and gender in political practice and processes. The cases of the three *kinnars* of MP that I examine in this thesis, for example, supplement current theorisations of political practice in India, especially with regard to scholarship on caste-based political practice and the assessment mechanisms for affirmative action in relation to gender rather than caste.

Scholarship tends to focus on the *hijras* as a subject of study in itself, rather than in relation to wider social structures in India. This is understandable given that *hijra* communities function as any community might, in relation to their own social spaces, customs, and kinship relations. Moreover, *hijras* stay involved in their own affairs, apart from their dealings with the mainstream public in day-to-day interactions often connected to their ritual work. The community thus tends to be considered in isolation. However, in the last fifteen years, there has been engagement with democratic processes throughout the country, with *hijras* standing for elections and campaigning in many parts of the country with varying success. Their electoral victories have added to an awareness among wider *hijra* communities regarding their citizenship rights and many *hijra* candidates have campaigned with specific demands for the *hijra* community in mind. The occurrence of *hijras* contesting elections demands that new research be undertaken into documenting and analysing the structures and links being built between a previously isolated group and the wider public, as they are played out in the field of democratic politics. Past topics of study regarding the *hijra* community include their gendered, religious, or social practices, with an emphasis on the *hijras*' perceived non-heteronormative gender and sexuality. Based on feminist and anthropological writings in the 1970s and 1980s, *hijras* were often classified along archetypal gender lines, determined as either 'deviant' or as 'liberated' from normative gender categories. Literature on *hijras* tended to focus on their role as an alternative 'third' sex, a distinct

gender and sex position from the western binary model of sex and gender (see Herdt 1994; Nanda 1994; Nanda 1999). The third term, Marjorie Garber writes, allows for a conceptual move from a dual relation to a chain of elements:

the 'third term' is *not* a *term*. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated 'blurred' sex as signified by a term like 'androgyny' or 'hermaphrodite', although these words have culturally specific significance at certain historical moments. The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge.

(1992: 11)

A discursive position as 'third' framed such writing on the *hijras*, positing them as an alternative gender role, standing in for the possibility of difference.

However, western-focused scholarship on gender and sexuality has provided other important avenues through which *hijra* identity might be analysed, particularly work by Judith Butler and Judith (Jack) Halberstam on the performativity of gender. Butler's work on gender, as a 'stylised repetition of acts' (1990: 140), reveals the ways in which the body and identity are constituted through the processual reiteration and reification of normalising practices. The subject is constituted within a matrix of gender relations, but appears naturalised through the productive power of the reiterated practice over time. 'Sex' functions as a regulatory ideal, a practice of resignification that belongs to a sanctioned set of conventions, which must be reiterated in order to produce the effect it names. Processual, reiterated practice reveals the instability of identity (1993: 127), creating the possibility for subversion where the subject recognises the production of norms and the political interests inherent within them (*ibid.*: 30). Butler's work therefore can help to frame a discussion of *hijra* identity, as that which is constructed within a heteronormative matrix that posits such an identity as different, or deviant. Moreover, Halberstam's work on the policing of gender and the multiplicity of identities and vernaculars (in particular relation to female masculinity) provides a further conceptual framework in which one might examine *hijra* identity (1998). Halberstam, in contrast to literature that relies on 'thirdness', perceives such reliance as stabilising the gender binary that such a term or concept should disrupt. Instead of subsuming multiple identities under a term such as 'third gender', Halberstam focuses on multiplicity, positing that such a study of 'a queer subject position...can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity' (1998: 9). By questioning the use of singular categories of understanding, Halberstam calls for 'new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies', perhaps by refusing to engage with conventional gender norms (*ibid.*). Multiple, unlimited displays of gender are therefore necessary rather than constituting a separate 'third' category for those who are deemed non-normative, such that new or ignored categories can be added to an understanding of the gender spectrum.

Scholarship on the *hijras* has taken up and developed such approaches, critiquing an earlier attitude of scholarly claims that celebrated the ‘liberatory’ potential of *hijras* and other ‘third-sex’ identities from constrictive westernised gender-binaries. These critiques have problematised the ‘third-sex’ category and called for deeper analysis of individuals’ lived experience (Cohen 1995), including focusing on the construction of identity through linguistic markers (Hall 1995, 1997), and the necessity of investigating the heterogeneity of performance and behaviour which demands a reconceptualisation of sexual identity in relation to discourses of religion, nationalism, colonialism, and class, as well as other markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, region, and caste (Patel 1997; Reddy 2005). More recent literature on gender and sexuality, drawing on transnational discourses concerning ‘minority’ sexualities, contemplates *hijras* as a form of MSM (‘men who have sex with men’ or ‘males who have sex with males’ to account for males who do not identify as men) or transgender identity, in order to theorise the sexual practices of these communities in modern India. Such literature is informed by scholarship regarding sexual practices in the time of AIDS and transnational LGBT and queer movements (Cohen 2005; Bose and Bhattacharyya 2007; Narrain and Gupta 2011; Dutta 2012b; Roy 2012). Such work is often focused on metropolitan sites such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bangalore, and calls attention to the numerous sites and discourses through which sexuality and identity is played out, particularly sexualities and gender identities traditionally seen as non-heteronormative in Indian society. There has also been research into *hijra* identity and citizenship, exploring how *hijras*’ identities and performance might disrupt narratives of citizenship and the law through the performance of gender identity that refuses categorisation and problematises existing classificatory mechanisms and modes of recognition (Narrain 2007; Atluri 2012; Dutta 2012a).

Work on the *hijras* that does not focus on their sex or gender is less extensive, and primarily tends to examine the religious or ritual performances or social structures in the community (Carstairs 1957; Opler 1960, 1961; Shah 1961; Sharma 1989). *Hijras*’ practices are viewed as deviating from normative models of religious practice or kinship networks found across the Indian subcontinent, blending religious traditions to suit communal and individual needs and by adopting the structures associated with traditional kinship networks and practices and re-employing them within *hijra* communities (Sharma 1989; Jaffrey 1997; Bockrath 2003). Both *hijras*’ religious practices and social structures are often seen as ‘borrowing’ from traditional Indian norms, and thus as secondary to or derivative of normative practice. Ultimately, *hijras* are portrayed as deriving significance and meaning from their adoption of mainstream practices. A notable exception is research done on the *hijras* and the annual festival at Koovagam in Tamil Nadu. *Hijras* are specifically known as ‘*aravaṇi*’ or ‘*tirunaṅkai*’ in this state. There is a body of literature on *tirunaṅkai* ritual practices at this festival,

where *tirunaṅkai*s give themselves in marriage to the god Aravāṇ and mourn his death, as widows, on the following day (Hiltebeitel 1995; Pattanaik 2002; Craddock 2012). A further body of work on the *hijras* traces both the mythological and historical trajectory of the community (Zwilling and Sweet 1993, 1996, 2000; Preston 1987; Agrawal 1997; Jaffrey 1997; Gannon 2009), fixing the figure of the *hijra* as a modern identity that draws its legitimacy from a historical past, which has had a formative impact on *hijra* identity today. These works enable a historical understanding of *hijra* communities, and are important in bringing together some of the threads used by *hijras* in constructing their identity in modern society.

While the majority of scholarship has focused on a specific aspect of *hijra* identity, such as gendered performance or social structure, the two most influential works written on the community are ethnographies of two communities' lived experience. Both works provide an understanding of what is often considered a subordinate and secretive community and these two works are widely credited with providing much of what is known about the *hijras*. The first is Serena Nanda's *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (1999, 2nd edition), a study of a *hijra* community located in an unnamed city referred to as 'Bastipore' in South India. Nanda offers an ethnographic account of this community and highlights its subordinate status, focusing on *hijras*' narratives to explore gendered, religious, and social practices. Nanda's work contemplates *hijras*' daily lives, drawing on individual stories to explain how individuals joined the community and left their natal families, the emasculation operation, how the community functions, their relationships with one another and men outside the community, and the social violence they suffer. Nanda calls the *hijras* 'neither men nor women', and views them as a specific sex/gender categorisation (although subordinate to male and female categories). The second influential study is Gayatri Reddy's *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (2005), focusing on *hijra* communities living in Secunderabad and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. Reddy's work provides a fuller analysis of *hijras*' gendered presentation. Her work is significant in reconceptualising the *hijra* subject in answer to the literature that focuses on sexuality as a primary marker of *hijra* identity. She argues that subjectivity and *hijras*' own understanding of sexuality is mediated through an experience of other modes of difference, such as caste class, regional, and life-historical specificities, and through engagement with the concept of *izzat*, or honour. Reddy provides a thorough discussion of historical and contemporary work on the *hijras* and of the performance of religious identity in the Hyderabad context. She focuses on how gender and sexed identity is constructed in relation to other modes of difference, questioning how 'sexuality studies', as a field of research, is conceptualised and conducted. I discuss both authors in greater detail in the first chapter, presenting an overall view of *hijra* communities in India. Given that political participation was the primary focus of my

research, I supplement my discussion about communities and households in MP and in India with their (and other) research, focusing on comparisons and similarities.

It is significant to note the regional focus of scholarship on the *hijras*, since there are communities found throughout India, with significant variation from region to region, not just in terms of identification but social practice. *Hijras* in central India, as I found in the case of MP, construct their identities in ways different to those of the *hijras* in South India, through performance, language, and belief. Both Reddy and Nanda focused on communities in the South, and, as mentioned above, there has been excellent research produced on *tirunaṅkais* in Tamil Nadu. On the whole, anthropological work on the *hijras* has been confined to the South, with recent research on sexual identity and sexual health in metropolitan cities that discusses *hijra* sexuality. One exception is Kira Hall's work on *hijras* in Banaras, Uttar Pradesh (1995). There is little or no academic scholarship on *hijra* communities in most states of India, including MP.

The occurrence of individual *hijras'* political success in MP, alongside other successes throughout the country, introduces a new theme for research regarding the *hijra* community and group identity. Research on specific individuals and their local communities in MP, compared with previous scholarship, revealed that there is a vast range of variation among the community, in terms of practice, belief, and understanding of what it means to be a *hijra* or *kinnar*. Such variation highlights the need for further studies in order to appreciate significant differences and divisions among *hijra* communities in terms of outlook and practice. An engagement with contemporary social processes, including political practice and social activism, is having a significant impact on the way *hijras* create a sense of their identity, both among and in relation to the *hijra* community and the mainstream public. Contemporary political participation forces *hijras* to reframe their identity in relation to modern normative social categories and sanctioned modes of interpretation. Current activism, including within LGBT movements, demands that *hijras* are understood in relation to discourses on sexuality and gender, circulating not only in India but internationally. In light of *hijras'* political participation as candidates, campaigners, and voting participants, and in the wider context of an 'opening up' of democratic spaces to various minority and marginalised communities, I believe that it is necessary to address the relationship between *hijra* identity and the concept of representation and to ask in what ways representation shapes and informs an understanding of *hijra* identity in contemporary India.

II. Theoretical Framework

Given the nature of the thesis in crossing multiple fields of study, different chapters will address and review literature that is directly relevant to my analysis and discussion. In this section, however, I will outline the literature that is directly related to my overall argument with respect to the theoretical frameworks employed and the structure of the thesis.

The thesis sets out to consider the impact that representative practices have had on *kinnar* identity in Madhya Pradesh, focusing in particular on individuals who have been elected into democratic institutions at the state and urban body level. I theorise representation by drawing upon Gayatri Spivak's two forms of representation, in which the subject speaks 'for' and 'as', revealing the inherent contradictions in any act of representation (1990). Her theorisations complicate *kinnars'* political participation and representation, I believe, through a consideration of how *kinnars* both represented their constituents, speaking 'for' them as representatives, and how *kinnars* spoke 'as', being re-presented as individuals who would better serve those they represented due to their marginality from mainstream networks and spaces.

In discussing representation in the sense of 'political proxy', I will draw on literature that addresses the political representation of marginalised groups in deliberative and legislative bodies, as a means of rectifying historical and existing inequalities (Kymlicka 1989; Williams 1998; McMillan 2005), alongside the problems with identifying beneficiaries for preferential schemes (Williams 1998; Mansbridge 1999) and then examine various critiques of preferential schemes, particularly in the Indian context (Sowell 1990; McMillan 2005; Sisodia 2007; Yadav 2009; Kulkarni 2012). *Kinnars* served as proxy representatives of their constituents, by—in two of the three cases examined in this thesis—contesting seats that had been reserved for other 'marginalised' groups, given that there are no reservations for *kinnars* according to current schemes. I will consider how the representation of marginalised groups occurs, particularly drawing upon the work of Jane Mansbridge on descriptive representation (1999), who argues that descriptive representatives tend to mirror the experiences and outward manifestations of the represented group. However, the re-presentation of *kinnars* functioned simultaneously with discourses that spoke to their ability to be proxy representatives. *Kinnars* were discursively constructed as politicians who were more likely to serve public needs, as self-sacrificing and honest, unlike previous politicians. I draw upon Stuart Hall's work on representation, as the production of meaning through language (2002), in order to explore how *kinnars* were represented as potential politicians.

Hall offers a nuanced way in which to concentrate on the modes through which representation occurs, such as can be demonstrated through an exploration of *kinnars'*

campaigns and elections. Hall argues that language builds up a culture of shared understandings so that a representational system produces meaning for a specific group, through shared modes of interpretation (2002: 1), where meaning is produced and exchanged in every interaction (*ibid.*: 3) through shared conceptual maps and shared language (*ibid.*: 17). For Hall, representation is the 'production of meaning through language' (*ibid.*: 16), through representational systems of concepts and signs, although it only occurs through an active process of interpretation (*ibid.*: 32) and is thus contingent and historically specific. Hall focuses on a discursive approach to language, which emphasises the 'historical specificity of a particular form or regime of representation' (*ibid.*: 6), and not on language itself as a general concern or how language produces meaning (the semiotic approach).

Hall's work explicitly links representation to identity production, through a study of the concrete modes through which representation occurs, and I will adopt his approach in an analysis of the specific representative practices surrounding *kinnar* elections in MP, which, I argue, focus on *kinnars'* lack of identifiable characteristics and their presumed marginality from normative social spaces. An emphasis on their 'lack of identity' (a lack of caste, religion, gender, and of belonging to society) reified *kinnars'* marginality, portraying them as outside of normative social structures. I will argue, therefore, that *kinnar* identity cannot be said to be representative, in terms of a descriptive sense or in relation to other forms of representative-constituent relationships, as theorised by Mansbridge (2003). Mansbridge discusses four normative forms of representation, aside from descriptive representation, as 'promissory' (promises are made to voters), 'anticipatory' (people vote in a retrospective manner), 'gyroscopic' (representatives act without external incentives, according to their own beliefs), and 'surrogate' (the surrogate representative shared experiences with a surrogate community, advancing substantive interests). In each, forms of relationships between representative and constituent occur in different—but not mutually exclusive—forms, such that representation between representative and constituent works in multiple and complex ways. I will use her theorisations to frame my conclusions regarding the representative relationships developed between *kinnar* politicians and their constituents. I will argue that relationships were developed akin to gyroscopic and anticipatory models, where *kinnars* were presumed to a greater commitment to the public good, and where characteristics such as their presumed honesty, incorruptibility, and lack of social ties were taken into account, in relation to the experience of previous politicians who had failed in relation to promissory and anticipatory forms. *Kinnars* thus served their constituents' needs of a particular time and location; however their re-presentation within political spheres reified their presumed difference from others within their localities, remarginalising them within local democratic spaces.

Furthermore, I will argue that *kinnars* were unable to accrue significant material or symbolic gains through representation, including benefitting in terms of raising their social status or increasing positive stereotypes about *kinnars* in general. I frame this conclusion by employing Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations on capital, arguing that *kinnars* were unable to translate their experience within political spheres into lasting gains for themselves and their communities. I will outline his theorisations here in order to more clearly frame my later discussion in chapter four.

Bourdieu's model of social capital removes the concept of 'capital' from purely economic activity and economic theory and points to three fundamental guises in which capital may present itself in: (1) economic, which is directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised as property rights; (2) cultural, which, in certain conditions, is convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and (3) social, made up of social obligations, which may be converted into economic capital in certain conditions, and may be institutionalised in the forms of a title (Bourdieu 1986; 1989: 17). Capital is a resource that is valued because of its scarcity (*ibid.*), and acts as a social relation 'within a system of exchange' (Harker *et al.* 1990: 13). It is also the basis of domination, although participants may not recognise this. Accumulation of capital allows individuals to thrive and succeed; Harker *et al.* argue that the most powerful conversion of capital is to 'symbolic' capital, which is the form in which different forms of capital 'are perceived and recognized as legitimate' (*ibid.*). Bourdieu writes that in the struggle for 'the production of common sense, or more precisely, for the monopoly over legitimate naming', agents use the symbolic capital that they have acquired 'in previous struggles and which may be juridically guaranteed' (1989: 21). Symbolic capital might be 'officially sanctioned and guaranteed', such as a title, 'a socially recognised qualification', such as a school diploma, which is a 'piece of universally recognised and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets' (*ibid.*). Bourdieu argues that it is an 'official definition of an official identity, it frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective' (*ibid.*: 21-22). Symbolic capital is necessary for an individual to generate symbolic power. Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as power, one which can 'impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions', and as a credit: 'it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition' (*ibid.*: 23). The accumulation of symbolic power is of ultimate importance so that actors can impose their vision and views upon fields and contests within those fields, by virtue of recognition of their legitimate position.

Bourdieu theorises the interaction between 'strategic action' (which is aimed at accumulating or transferring capital) and structural forces and institutional norms by referring to 'fields' within which the struggles for particular resources are played out

(Jeffrey 2001: 220). Each field is shaped by forces, such as state institutions, which are not connected to actors and their strategies, however, fields are reproduced and transformed by the practices of agents within them (*ibid.*). Fields, Harker *et al.* argue, identify areas of struggle, such as the field of intellectual life, of literary and artistic taste, of politics, and so on (1990: 9). Possession of power, through forms of capital, commands access to profits that are valued and at stake in each field. Strategies and struggles are intimately tied to fields in order to attain capital and thus power. Power is therefore central to Bourdieu's model since an acquisition or loss of power changes the position of agents within the field, leading to its restructuring.

Capital is generated through labour and is embodied in the dispositions of the habitus. The habitus refers to a set of dispositions, which are 'created and reformulated through the conjuncture of objective structures and personal history' (Harker *et al.* 1990: 10). The habitus is internalised, and its dispositions drive an individual's meaningful practices and perceptions and ways of contesting any given field. Habitus includes a person's knowledge and understanding of the world, which 'contributes to the reality of that world' (*ibid.*: 11). Habitus, crucially, is never fixed: as positions within fields change, so do the dispositions that constitute an individual's habitus (*ibid.*).⁴ Harker *et al.* write that habitus is 'intimately linked' to capital since some habitus, such as that of dominant social and cultural fractions, will 'act as multipliers of various kinds of capital', and thus constitute a form of symbolic capital in and of themselves (*ibid.*: 12).

As I will show, while each *kinnar* had some economic and cultural capital (objectified, but not embodied or institutionalised), their social capital, as a member of the *kinnar* community, was only intelligible within the field of *hijra* society itself. Thus, I will argue, it did not benefit them in the political sphere and did not convert into symbolic capital. The inability for *kinnars* to convert their social capital indicates that there was no framework of reference available by which to understand their entry and participation in politics.

III. Fieldwork, Methodology, and Positionality

I carried out fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad and Becharaji in Gujarat. The aim of my fieldwork was to investigate *kinnars'* political participation in MP and I decided to undertake the research using various data collection methods. In formulating the project, it was clear that qualitative

⁴ There are however constraints upon individuals' agency, including the habitus of socialising agents (through the influence of others' ritual practices), the principles of the corresponding habitus, and the objective conditions of the material and social environment (Harker *et al.* 1990: 11-12)

fieldwork⁵ undertaken in Madhya Pradesh, particularly in the localities in which different *kinnars* had been elected, would be a key component of my research. This was necessary in order to collect data on the specific locations in which *kinnars* had been elected and to conduct interviews with *kinnars* themselves, given that only one article has been written on *kinnar* electoral victories in Madhya Pradesh (Reddy 2003). While fieldwork was key to shaping the project, it is clear that—perhaps fittingly given the focus of this thesis on ‘representation’—the data that would be produced as the result of the kind of research I was undertaking, as well as the discussion that I would undertake in order to collate and make sense of such data, would be partial. As James Clifford asserts, ‘ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete’, however, once this fact is accepted and built into ethnographic practice, ‘a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact’ (1986: 7). Clifford argues that the practice of ethnography is embedded in and enacts power relations, performing a complex and ambivalent function within these relations (*ibid.*: 9). Qualitative fieldwork as part of this study, therefore, provided a partial description and analysis of the complex discourses and events that resulted in the election of *kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh, but it was employed as a method that allowed for an in-depth (but necessarily incomplete) study of electoral success among a marginalised group of which very little has been studied previously. Moreover, the choice of specific electoral victories that would be studied, within a particular state and time frame, also decreased the scale of this study.

As a result of time in the field and as a means by which to discuss *kinnars*’ elections, I chose a case study approach in order to provide a comparative framework for my study and analysis. Given time and resources’ limitations, due to the size of MP state itself and the distance between different localities in which *kinnars* had been elected, a case study approach allowed for a more in-depth study of three electoral victories, rather than attempting to collect data on elections from six different sites (of the six *kinnars* which I knew had been elected at the start of my fieldwork). It was important to have more time to spend in each location, given that the study required a thorough understanding of each location and the conditions for each electoral victory. Moreover, a case study approach, focusing on three elections, provided data which could be analysed for similarities and differences. Although three cases could not necessarily provide conclusions that could be extended to theorise the entry of other marginalised groups within democratic spheres, which could be a limitation of this approach, these case studies did allow for conclusions to be drawn concerning the

⁵ I use the phrase ‘qualitative fieldwork’ rather than ‘ethnographic research’ to indicate the purpose and nature of my research in Madhya Pradesh. I was focused on researching a set of events in the past and examining the outcomes of these events, rather than being embedded in different *kinnar* communities and intending to provide a rich, ethnographic description of those particular communities and their environments.

construction of *kinnar* identity within discourses relating to decentralised democracy in contemporary India, alongside conclusions pertaining to the construction of identity within political rhetoric. The case study approach therefore provided a framework for this study and allowed for more in-depth discussion on individual elections.

Another method employed in this research was qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were chosen as the method through which to collect data in the form of people's opinions and assessments in relation to the subject of *kinnars'* elections. Interviews provided an effective method to learn about what people thought and believed, and generated large amounts of data that I could assess afterwards. I attempted to access multiple groups in the interview process, but acknowledge that due to time and resources (including interpreters' time, and occasionally, interest), I was unable to access and interview certain social groups in particular localities. Fully structured interviews, as I found after the first interview, proved to be too rigid a process. I opted for a semi-structured approach where I had questions planned and topics that I wanted to discuss, and this provided flexibility, particularly in reacting with additional questions based on interviewees' responses. Most interviews took place in interviewees' place of work or homes, both during office hours and in the evenings and at weekends and the majority of interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

I conducted sixty semi-structured interviews in MP with *kinnars* who had been active in politics; *kinnars'* supporters, voters, and their critics; journalists; and local politicians and people who worked in local government offices. I also interviewed around ten more *kinnars* and *hijras* in Mumbai and Gujarat, in a more informal capacity, and not focused on the political participation of *kinnars* in MP. I knew of six *kinnars* who had successfully contested elections in MP between 1999 and 2009 and learned of a seventh towards the end of my time in the field. I met and interviewed five of the seven *kinnars*, four on numerous occasions: Shabnam Mausi, Kamla Bua, Heera Bai,⁶ and Kamla Jaan, respectively in the locations of Shahdol and Anuppur, Sagar, Jabalpur, and Katni, all located in central to eastern MP. Interviews focused on their political participation, although three were willing to speak about other and more personal subjects. With other non-*kinnar* interviewees in the above named locations, I focused primarily on the nature of the *kinnars'* campaigns, elections, and tenure, including interviewees' impressions and assessments of the *kinnar* in question. Interviews were often open-ended or semi-structured, providing the opportunity for people to become involved in the process and allowing for a more flexible approach in conducting the interviews. Interviews were conducted between the subjects, interpreters, and myself. Often other people were present for the interviews; on one occasion, around twenty people were watching the interview take place, wanting to

⁶ For a discussion of Heera Bai's election and time in office, see Appendix A.

know what was going on. On the occasion that the subjects wished to speak English, my interpreter remained present. Interviews were driven, to a degree, by the interpreters themselves, and there was some negotiation between myself and the interpreters as to the direction the interview might take, if not dictated by the subject. One limitation, therefore, was language and the use of interpreters. I was able to enlist the help of or employ different individuals in each location who acted as translators and facilitators during interviews and interactions. Thus, in certain regards, access to subjects was hindered through the presence and use of interpreters. Although access to language or meaning could at times be a limiting factor in the interview process, occasionally interviews were hindered by the interpreters' themselves, in terms of both driving or managing interviews in directions they wanted or thought was important, and again, by belonging to the communities in which we were located (that is, being an 'insider' and knowledgeable of different events and contexts). Most of the interpreters lived and worked as part of the communities in which we conducted interviews, and occasionally there was reluctance on the part of interviewees to speak about matters with someone who was not seen as an outsider or 'unbiased' to the situation. *Kinnar* interviewees, for example, occasionally became displeased with how questions were phrased, or irritated if an interpreter suggested a different viewpoint. At the same time, the use of an interpreter influenced the interview context. Many interviewees seemed happy to speak to me and answer questions, as a perceived outsider to the situation. Often stories varied according to the interviewee, as well as the emphasis placed on certain facts within those stories; it thus appeared that such a telling was for my benefit, to put across what the interviewee thought was important.

Oral consent was taped or agreed before every recorded and non-recorded session, with signed consent given by the *kinnar* subjects involved. Most interviews were recorded and later transcribed. A few subjects wanted to remain anonymous but were happy to be recorded; another interviewee was interviewed but later wanted the recording deleted and I was refused one informal interview by a group of *kinnars* because their *guru* was not present. I was told to return when she was. In a few cases, I approached the subjects with a transcription and asked them whether they wanted anything changed or removed. I took a qualitative approach to this work, stressing subjective and contextual accuracy. Many of the dates, 'facts', and events that I discuss were narrated by individuals who have a stake in the way the story was told and recorded, and their accounts often differ from other versions of the same event. It is not my intention to mediate the veracity of these accounts but to present them as the subjects of my research did. Some inaccuracies stem simply from people's memory of the fact, due to time elapsed.

Finally, a note on my positionality in a thesis about representation. I am, as Homi K. Bhabha might suggest, a 'hybrid' subject/product, negotiating the multiple

ways in which fixed subject positions contest and collide and constructing the guise of an identity in the spaces in-between. As Bhabha writes in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(1994: 1-2)

Bhabha writes that subjects are formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference: the perspective of the in-between is the space in which selfhood, singular or communal, is formed, a 'hybrid' of two opposing cultures. Every time I met someone new during my fieldwork I was asked, 'where are you from?' and the answer was never accepted until I said 'China'. As racially Chinese with generations of my ancestors having been born and raised in Malaysia, baptised a Methodist as a result of my parents' schooling in colonial and then post-colonial Malaysia, confirmed a member of the Church of England, with only a British passport, having been born in Paddington, the first daughter of economic immigrants, only speaking English, and having visited China for two weeks during one vacation when I was 11, but having spent over a year, over my lifetime, in India, 'China' not only seemed a very simplistic answer, but one that identified one aspect above all others and represented who I was to that person in an intelligible way. Identity and representation thus come to be mutually constitutive, where representation expresses one's identity and makes it intelligible, and identity, to be recognised, must be represented. *Hijra* identity seemed for me to be the ultimate product of representation, and indicative of the extreme marginalisation that individuals can face, positioned as they are on the edges of society, gender and religious practices, and 'normative' anatomical forms, but I wanted to investigate further how a position of 'in-between-ness' affected their lives and sense of selfhood. *Hijras* are true hybrid subjects, produced in the moments of the articulation of cultural difference. I do not claim here to offer a 'truer' *hijra* subjectivity, but acknowledge the role that I too play in representing the *hijra* subject.

IV. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One provides an introductory overview of *hijra* or *kinnar* identity, focusing on several—but interconnected—aspects of their identity in contemporary Indian society. Despite their ritual role of performing blessings for newly wed couples and newly born infants, *hijras* face social marginalisation in many aspects of their lives, due to their

gendered performance and the way in which *hijra* communities are structured and function. I use this chapter to explore the multiple ways in which *hijras* are represented throughout India today, both by the mainstream public and by the *hijras* themselves in answer to common stereotypes about their behaviour and lives. I focus on four areas: literature (both historical and contemporary), gender practice, religion, and *hijra* society. Historical, legal, and literary sources have played a crucial role in producing various representations of the *hijra*, informing how this identity is constructed and seen by non-*hijras* and *hijras* alike. References to individuals of ambiguous gender and sexuality exist throughout classical sources and mythological narratives and eunuchs played an important role in the medieval courts as advisors, harem keepers, treasurers, and confidantes. *Hijras* use both discourses to attest to the important role they have played throughout the history of the subcontinent, providing a measure of legitimacy and respect for their identity, which is significant given its supposed modern deviancy. During the colonial era, many of the *hijras*' social practices were criminalised and their gender read as deviant. Colonial legislation, particularly in the form of the Indian Penal Code (1860) and the Act for the Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs (1897), criminalised the *hijra* subject, relating to sexual practice, emasculation, forms of income, and practices that ensured social reproduction. Contemporary *hijras* carry traces of both these positions—celebrated and criminalised—within their modern identities, performing an ongoing negotiation with these historical representations in the ways *hijras* forge their identities today. *Hijras* also negotiate gendered practices, navigating and manipulating stereotypes of both masculine and feminine behaviour to create a gender identity that contradicts expected gendered behaviour. *Hijras* blur the boundaries of gendered behaviour and expose the performance of gender norms, blending elements typically seen as masculine or feminine. A crossing of practices is mirrored in *hijras*' religious practices. *Hijras* borrow fluidly from traditions that are viewed conventionally as mutually exclusive. In MP, *hijras* draw upon Muslim and Hindu traditions, generating a unique religious identity and praxis. By amalgamating various elements of practice and belief from both traditions, *hijras* construct a sense of religious identity that explains and gives significance to their marginality in society. Making sense of their marginality is also evident through the construction of numerous networks and structures that are particular to *hijra* communities. Unlike kinship networks based on consanguinity and marriage, *hijra* networks and relationships are maintained out of choice, providing support, protection, and an integral source of comfort for *hijras*, who are usually ostracised from normative social networks. Various relationships are formed to establish networks between *hijras* and are a source of love and community. Through an exploration of these four aspects, I demonstrate that *hijra* identity is represented in specific ways, both by *hijras* themselves, in answer to mainstream narratives regarding the groups' difference and deviancy, and by

mainstream society, as they locate *hijra* identity in relation to normative social, gender, and religious practices. Comprehending these representations is crucial for understanding what *hijra* identity 'is' in modern India, in terms of past images of the community, present representations, and future visions. I aim to present the ways in which *hijras* have been constructed as individuals whose practices are subordinate to and marginalised within normative social, religious, gendered, and historical models. While this discussion might indicate their marginalisation in multiple spheres, at the same time I highlight the active ways in which *hijras* construct their identities in relation to these discourses.

In Chapter Two, I discuss my fieldwork on *kinnars*' political participation and present the case studies chosen for the thesis. My research was predominantly conducted in the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh between November 2010 and August 2011. I had four sites of research: the cities of Jabalpur and Sagar and the towns of Katni Murwara and Shahdol, with additional trips conducted to other parts of eastern MP and to Mumbai in Maharashtra and Ahmedabad and Becharaji in Gujarat. Sagar, Katni, and the town of Shahdol were three of the sites where *kinnars* were elected between 1999 and 2009, which constitute the three case studies for the thesis. MP proved to be a rich location in which to conduct fieldwork, as the state in which *kinnars* have had the greatest success in contesting elections and due to a lack of research on *kinnars* within this state. I present key findings from my fieldwork, concentrating on specific actors in each location and points of interest about each election and the *kinnar* involved. I also discuss a *sammelan* (an inter-regional gathering) I attended in Sagar, which has value in adding to research conducted on social structures and functions within the setting of MP; Becharaji, where the temple of the patron goddess of the *hijras*, Bahuchara Mata, is located; and meetings with Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a social activist and *hijra* in Mumbai. In the second half of the chapter, I examine the three case studies: Kamla Jaan, Mayor of the town of Katni Murwara, 1999-2002, Shabnam Mausli, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Sohagpur, Shahdol district, 2000-2003, and Kamla Bua, Mayor of the city of Sagar, 2009-2011. I present key interviews that were conducted during fieldwork and explore important aspects of the *kinnars*' campaigns and elections. I discuss the specifics for each case study, focusing on how each came to run for office and the nature and efficacy of their campaigns, including the way each was represented to the voting public as a suitable candidate, given their lack of political experience and education and their identity as a *kinnar*. Significantly, *kinnars* were presented as viable political candidates by highlighting their difference from professional politicians and in the case studies I address certain issues relating to the representation of *kinnar* identity in the sphere of local politics.

In the next two chapters, I investigate how *kinnar* identity has been shaped by and through political participation and consider the relationship between

representation and individual and group identity in MP. Although each case study has significant differences, in terms of the individuals themselves—their personalities, situations, and the way in which they participated in local politics—there are important similarities regarding each locality and how each was represented as a candidate, and this reveals how *kinnar* identity was moulded and manipulated in a particular way in order to win elections.

In Chapter Three, I theorise the concept of representation that I use throughout the remainder of the thesis, focusing on the question of representation for previously marginalised groups in political and legislative bodies. I adopt Spivak's theorisations of two distinct forms of representation, representation as political proxy and 'representation' as presentation, in this case, as a result of political participation. For the second theorisation, I draw upon the work of Stuart Hall who theorises how representation (the production of meaning through language) is inherently linked to identity production and offers concrete methods through which to analyse the ways in which representation occurs. I focus on both theorisations of 'representation', addressing how *kinnars* were representative of their constituents and how *kinnar* identity was represented to the public through, as a result of, political participation. Spivak's theorisations of the practices of representation can be linked to Judith Butler's work on the performance of gender identity. Butler posits that the gendered and sexed body is brought into being through the processual repetition of gender performance (1990, 1993), pointing to the constant performance of identity in order to render the body gendered, and significantly, legible. In the practice of representation, *kinnars'* identities and bodies were brought into being through political rhetoric, shaped by narratives that dictated how their characteristics, bodies, and behaviours made them more suitable political representatives. Later in the chapter, I focus on the ways their identities were constructed through the repetition of norms and narratives associated with *kinnar* identity.⁷

⁷ There is significant potential for this bridging of theory, focusing on the construction of the subaltern subject and the performance and intelligibility of such an identity within normative discourses. Spivak's theorisation of representation and intelligibility here can be informed by theory concerned with the performance of identity, particularly that offered by Judith Butler and her work on gender performance. I have attempted to include queer theory in certain parts of the thesis, especially considering queer theory's contribution in the sense of rethinking concepts and structures afresh. In particular, 'queer' theory has been used to complicate certain arguments in relation to *kinnars'* 'queer' history (chapter 1); gender performance (chapter 1); the notion of 'failure' in relation to *kinnar* political participation (chapter 4); and the potential for *kinnars* to embody a 'different' politics (chapter 4). While I employ queer scholarship at various points in the thesis, I want to address limitations it might have in theorising the 'queer' *hijra* subject. Queer theory offers significant frameworks in order to critique normalising systems and discourses, but has traditionally focused on sexuality and nonheteronormative bodies, place, and time, and their resistance to heteronormative conceptions in the West. An overreliance on queer theory could potentially interpret *hijra* subjectivity within modes of thinking which are legible within queer paradigms, rather than understanding the *hijra* as intelligible in its own terms, including understanding the *hijra* primarily as a sexual subject. I attempt to balance my discussion by both employing important frameworks offered by queer theory and by considering *hijra* subjectivity within its own frames of reference.

I begin the chapter by addressing the theorised rationales for the representation of marginalised groups in deliberative and legislative bodies in order to redress existing and historical inequalities and analyse problems with identifying beneficiaries. Group representation through preferential, compensatory schemes in the Indian context has prompted critiques, including the caste-based criteria for identifying beneficiaries, the solidification of caste identities, the creation of a 'creamy layer' of beneficiaries among specific groups, and the expansion, rather than reduction, of such policies. Given that reservation policies can be extended to recognise beneficiaries on multiple grounds on which their political marginalisation is based, I then address the question of reservation for *kinnars* in political bodies. In the second half of the chapter, I consider the re-presentation of *kinnars'* identity through political participation, addressing the second form of representation theorised by Spivak. I argue that a new, negotiated representation of *kinnar* identity was constructed, rendering *kinnar* identity intelligible within the sphere of politics and for potential voters. I analyse the forms in which representation occurred, including electoral rhetoric, rumours, and public narratives about *kinnar* identity. *Kinnars* were presented as lacking experience, including party agendas and interests, as well as caste, religious, and community ties. Their 'lack' of identity was promoted as a strength, such that *kinnars* were positioned as more representative of a variety of constituent groups. The necessity of maintaining marginality appears contradictory to each attempt to gain *kinnars* a central place in local politics, and I argue that this marginality is what limited *kinnars* from being representative of their constituents. Moreover, by making specific aspects of their identity intelligible to constituents, *kinnars'* lack of identity and marginality was manipulated in order to portray them as viable political candidates, reifying that very marginality.

In Chapter Four I theorise *kinnar* political participation, offering three possible ways to interpret *kinnars'* political success. The first interpretation mirrors initial analyses of the spate of electoral victories in MP, where electoral success was interpreted as a 'proof' of democracy. The context for *kinnars'* victories is made possible by a functioning and decentralised form of democracy. The electoral success of *kinnars* might be read as having symbolic, expressive, or educative effects, where representation is an end in itself, allows different interests to be translated into legislative policy, or has a didactic effect on institutional members and the institution itself. Yet, their performance in office was seen as no more successful than previous politicians and *kinnars* were represented as marginal to mainstream society and unable to speak for themselves. I argue that there were few positive effects to their elections in symbolic, expressive, or educative terms. These conclusions are at odds with an assessment of their elections as a proof of democracy. A second interpretation posits *kinnars'* electoral success as a mockery of the democratic process. *Kinnars* were elected

to protest against politicians perceived as corrupt and inefficient and political parties seen as out of touch with voters' needs. The mockery was that anyone could be elected, even a *kinnar*, who symbolised incompetence and impotence; this interpretation is supported by assessments of *kinnars'* campaigns and elections as a 'joke', part of a popular revolt, and as a 'failed experiment'. *Kinnars* were not expected to perform well in politics, mocking both the democratic process of electing representatives and professional politicians who needed to be punished. The third interpretation is that political representation is not always beneficial for minority groups and may not translate into symbolic or material gains. I focus on material gains, specifically social status, and argue that there was no change in their social status as a result of political participation, focusing on stereotypes that were generated about the three *kinnars* whilst in office and after, where they were perceived as unqualified, 'impotent', reliant upon other people, and behaving in a way that reinforced negative stereotypes about *kinnars*. The production of negative stereotypes reinforced widely held assumptions about *kinnars* and thus *kinnars'* social status (both individual and group) was not raised as a result of political participation. I theorise a lack of social status and gains by using Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations of capital. While each *kinnar* had some economic and cultural capital (objectified, but not embodied or institutionalised), their social capital, as a member of the *kinnar* community, was only intelligible within the field of *hijra* society itself. Thus, it did not benefit them in the political sphere and did not convert into symbolic capital. The inability of *kinnars'* social capital to convert indicates that there was no framework of reference available by which to understand their entry and participation in politics.

In Chapter Five, I consider the question of representation beyond the level of local politics. By broadening the angle of vision regarding 'representation', I explore a further avenue through which increased representation might run the risk of reifying the marginality of the *hijra* subject. I question how '*hijra*' identity is represented in relation to contemporary LGBT and queer activism and attend to the impact that 'representation' as a member of the LGBT collective has had on contemporary *hijra* identity, particularly through the inclusion of *hijra* identity under the label of 'transgender'. The reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code has led to a proliferation of State attempts designed to recognise the *hijra* or transgender subject, in order to address lasting inequalities faced by individuals in multiple walks of life. Representation for the 'community' is secured through certain voices, often from metropolitan and educated backgrounds, who have access to transnational discourses on LGBT rights. Such representation has the potential to construct a normative 'T' subject and an idea of normative *hijra* identity, bounded within LGBT and HIV / AIDS prevention discourses. I argue that representation of a specific version of *hijra* identity and the '*hijra* community's' interests runs the risk of normativising the *hijra* subject and

closing down the heterogeneous possibilities for identification with the category '*hijra*'. The focus of this final chapter is on highlighting the contradictions inherent in the practice of representation within the field of contemporary LGBT activism and to ask what space *hijras* and *kinnars* have as part of this movement. I explore the extent to which representation necessarily entails a re-presentation of identity that is aligned with predetermined modes of understanding and interpretation, ultimately normativising *hijra* identity.

My thesis concludes by arguing that, as exemplified by the case of the *hijras* or *kinnars* of MP, representation has the potential to alleviate historical and existing subordination but, at the same time, is inherently contradictory through an insistence on homogeneity and a singular understanding of an identity. Representation, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, can result in the re-marginalisation of a particular identity, because the heterogeneity that is present within any group is necessarily denied in order to render a subject intelligible within existing modes of interpretation and knowledge, particularly those that serve in the interests of legibility in the process of statecraft (Scott 1999). Representation creates the possibility for group benefits, but at the cost of individuals having to trade on the very identity that is the basis of and which maintains their marginality, in order to become intelligible. As Spivak writes, it is representation that renders the subaltern 'narrativisable', so that the subaltern no longer exists. Instead of the subaltern remaining at the 'absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic' (1985: 346), the subaltern is named, is made narrativisable and legible, and consequently loses their subalternity. *Hijras* and *kinnars*' inclusion within the fields of local MP politics and activism renders them legible to the modern State, such that they cease to be marginal and instead are made visible and normativised through naming and categorisation. Thus, representation might not end up ameliorating the social condition of the group in question, but can remarginalise many of the members of the group.

Chapter One

The Hijra 'Subject-Effect': Configuring Subjectivity in Literature, Gender Performance, Religious Practice, and Social Spaces

Hijras occupy a particular place in the public imagination, identified on account of their non-normative gender practices and existence on the margins of society. In this chapter I investigate how *hijras* have been represented in literature and contemporary scholarship, and in relation to their gendered and religious practices and social spaces, focusing on the state of Madhya Pradesh. I consider how *hijras* have been represented in these fields, responding to Gayatri Reddy's call to consider how multiple facets of identity engage with modes of gender and sexuality, rather than studying *hijras'* sex and gender as the primary marker of their identity. Figures with ambiguous gender and alternative sexualities played prominent roles in Hindu mythology and classical literature, as well as in the Islamic courts of Mughal India, but the way that 'eunuchs' were perceived by the British colonial administration significantly affected how these individuals were identified, through cataloguing, and then criminalising, the group's practices. In turn, contemporary scholarship has theorised *hijra* identity as primarily sexed and gendered, especially in relation to analyses that focus on their 'thirdness'. *Hijras* construct and negotiate their gender and sexed identities in relation to other MSM identities, through gender performance, and in relation to discourses regarding authenticity. *Hijras* frame their religious practices in reference to Hindu or Muslim traditions, borrowing somewhat fluidly from both and creating a unique sense of *hijra* religiosity. Amalgamative religiosity is necessary due to members joining communities from various social backgrounds; such practice might also stem from *hijras'* own interpretations of their genealogy, from Hindu, Jain, and Islamic traditions. *Hijra* communities provide significant spaces for interaction, support, and structure; I argue that religion and community practices are two important aspects that serve to construct *hijra* identity as a distinct communal identity. In this chapter, I explore how *hijra* subjectivity, or the *hijra* 'subject-effect' (to borrow Gayatri Spivak's phrase), is negotiated, as the effect of various knottings and configurations of multiple and discontinuous strands (1985: 341), including those relating to ideology, belief, history, caste, class, sexuality, and religiosity. I draw upon findings from my fieldwork, supplemented by extant scholarship on *hijra* identity. The reason for an extensive discussion of established scholarship in supporting the research in this chapter is that much of my fieldwork was focused upon political participation among *kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh. Research conducted with *kinnars* who had served as politicians was primarily focused on this subject, rather than investigating their historical subjectivity, gendered and religious practices, or their social structures, although there is, of course,

an intertwining of multiple aspects of *hijra* subjectivity that were evident and discussed throughout my fieldwork.

I. Figures of Ambiguous Sex in Literary Traditions

Historical representations and contemporary theorisations of *hijra* identity are significant to an understanding of *hijra* identity in modern India. I will examine references to individuals of ambiguous gender and sex in ancient myths and texts, writings from the medieval period, and colonial archives, and then move on to analyse contemporary academic scholarship, focusing on a critique of the literature that categorises *hijra* identity as a 'third' sex or gender. Contemporary classification through scholarship has fixed the *hijra* firmly as an alternative gender, distinct from male and female and homogenised as a 'third' category, yet it fails to consider the differentiations that exist among *hijras* themselves and in relation to a wider group of gender-variant individuals.

i. *Myths and Ancient Texts*

Hijras gain legitimacy as 'sacred' and powerful beings through references to characters with ambiguous gender and alternative sexualities in Indian mythology and ancient texts.¹ *Hijras* employ myths and narratives from various periods throughout history, drawing upon a cultural tradition shared by *hijras*, in which they make sense of and construct their identities in modern India. Studying sacred and historical narratives in the construction of the 'queer' subject has been a significant area of study, as evidenced through work done on queer history, for example, by Michel Foucault (1978) and David M. Halperin (1990)² and scholarship on *hijras* has considered narratives used in

¹ The term '*hijra*' is not included specifically among the terms used for varying gender ambiguity. These terms relate to individuals who practice transvestism and transgenderism; undergo transsexual transformation; or are categorised as 'unmales', 'eunuchs' or '*klibas*' (perhaps from the adjective '*klīv*', 'impotent'); a third—and fourth—gender referred to as '*napumsak*'; or those of a third sex, '*tritiya prakṛti*'. The last term is generally translated as 'third sex', but Zwilling and Sweet write that this term refers to 'feminised' males, who are effeminate and/or transvestite but are distinguishable from women (2000: 112). Elsewhere they conflate *hijra* and the 'unmales' and third sex 'of earlier times' (1996: 363). These terms are not interchangeable and are problematic by simultaneously being exclusionary and 'blanket' terms for a wide range of acts and 'identities' under the general homophobic and heteronormative rubric of a 'man who does not behave as a man should' (Doniger 1999: 279-80; Zwilling and Sweet 1993: 592-4). Categorisations fail to include adequately variations in materiality, sexual object choice, and sexual role. Arguably, the *hijras* range in as much variation as the persons to whom these terms referred.

² Textual analysis proved an important method for early discourses of queer theory, focusing on the construction of the knowledge of sexuality and the use of language. Considering the texts and mythology used by *hijras* could be important in making sense of how *hijras* employ multiple sources in representing their identity to mainstream society and negotiating negative stereotypes about *hijra* subjectivity. However, an emphasis on textual analysis might render the

the construction of *hijra* identity (Nanda 1999; Reddy 2003, 2005; Hossain 2012). Narratives that *hijras* use are part of a greater theme in ancient Hindu literature concerned with sexual ambiguity, transvestism, and sexed and gendered transsexualism (Goldman 1993; Doniger 1999, 2002; Pattanaik 2002). Better-known myths include those of the warrior Aravāṇ, who married Viṣṇu in an incarnation of the maiden Mohinī (Hiltebeitel 1995); Arjuna, the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, who spent a year at King Virāṭa's court disguised as a 'eunuch' during the Pāṇḍavas thirteenth year of exile (Pelissero 2002; Custodi 2007); and Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin, a woman who attained physical and psychological masculinity in order to aid Arjuna in killing Bhīṣma,³ the forefather of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas (van Buitenen 1978: 493, 532; Doniger 1999: 281-3). *Hijras* identify particularly with Arjuna, who was transformed into a eunuch for spurning the advances of the nymph, Urvaśī. It is unclear whether Arjuna underwent a physiological transformation or was just 'cross-dressing' (Custodi 2007: 211-2).⁴ *Hijras* also refer to a myth associated with the *Rāmāyaṇa* (which does not appear in the text), in which Rāma blesses their devotion to him and states that they will rule the world in the future.⁵ The myth projects *hijras'* hopes for better treatment in the future and indicates Rāma's specific blessing upon their community. Numerous myths refer to the creation of the first *hijra* and concern *hijras'* ability to bless or curse; I outline these myths in further detail below.

Myths and references from sacred texts play a significant role in constructing *hijra* identity. By referring to individuals of an ambiguous gender status or to individuals who had a special relationship with Rāma, *hijras* point to the existence of gender variant individuals in ancient times and claim an authentic identity that has existed throughout history and is recorded in sacred texts. By claiming association with prominent individuals in history and mythology, such as Arjuna, *hijras* make claims regarding their nature and character, attempting to challenge derogatory stereotypes about *hijras* in contemporary society and project an image of how they want to be seen:

hijra subject intelligible within queer paradigms, instead of contemplating this subject in its own terms, given that *hijras* do not emphasise texts as the basis upon which they create a sense of historical and contemporary identity. *Hijras* use such narratives in individual and unique ways, in many cases, not pointing to texts themselves as the basis for their claims. Oral narrative practices are a key feature of the way such narratives are shared within *hijra* communities, with many *hijras* not knowing particular narratives or any narratives about a specific figure, or indeed, from where such narratives come. For a further discussion of narrative and identity construction, see Ung Loh (forthcoming).

³ Bhīṣma himself is a figure of ambiguous gender since he renounced his 'sexuality' and right to procreate as a vow to his brother (see Flood 1996, Fitzgerald 2007).

⁴ Custodi adds that the nature of Arjuna's gender as 'Brhannadā' is never explicitly given, as eunuch, hermaphrodite, or transvestite. His 'ambiguous' name means 'great man' but in the feminine gender (which van Buitenen translates as 'having a large reed'; 1978: 9).

⁵ Lord Rāma returns after fourteen years of exile to find those who are 'neither man nor woman' waiting on the banks of the river, from which he had left the city of Ayodhya. He sent the 'men' and 'women' home, but these individuals, being neither, remained there. Rāma blesses these people for their devotion, telling them that they will rule the world in the future (Reddy 2003: 190).

as individuals who have existed throughout history and who are important within sacred history for their actions.

Further, *hijras* gain legitimacy as sacred beings through the Hindu philosophical association of asceticism with creativity: most dramatically demonstrated in the myth of Śiva's asceticism in order to create the world (Radice 2001: 45). Śiva's self-castration represents the immense power that can be gained through ascetic practice, known as 'creative asceticism'; this conceptualisation is demonstrated in the power and honour given to the figure of the *sannyāsi*. I elaborate on this discussion below, where the 'creative asceticism' of *hijras* will be discussed in relation to Hindu renunciate practices.

A third aspect of the legitimacy of the *hijra* subject is found in the adoption of both male and female elements. The most perfect association of both male and female elements is found in the form of Śiva Ardhanārīśvara, literally translated as 'lord who is half woman' (Goldberg 2002: 1). This form represents Śiva united with his *śakti*, or female creative power (*ibid.*; Pande 2004).⁶ Depictions of this unity are found in mythology, ritual, and art: these representations transmit 'the Hindu world view' (Nanda 1999: 20) and are an example of the variation 'permitted' among sexes and genders in India, from which *hijras* create a sense of self.

One of the earliest literary references to grammatical gender is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (roughly eighth to sixth century B.C.E). Leonard Zwilling and Michael Sweet, writing on third sex constructs in ancient India, discuss three grammatical genders as *pumlinga* (masculine), *strilinga* (feminine), and *napumsakalinga* (neuter), but note that applying the neutral gender to humans is problematic. 'Napumsaka' (literally 'not being a male') means to possess characteristics of both sexes (1996: 372) but is ambiguous, referring to males who did not conform to gender-role expectations, including those who were impotent, effeminate, or transvestite (1996: 362). 'Napumsaka' as the term for the third grammatical gender assumes that the 'unmale' is the true third sex (*ibid.*). By the beginning of the Common Era, the third sex was held to be determined at conception by biological causes, and, Zwilling and Sweet write, 'it is quite possible that it was among the schools of traditional medicine that a term actually meaning "third sex" was introduced', '*tritiya prakriti*'. By the fourth century the term was used as an equivalent for *napumsaka* (1996: 362-3), although it is unclear whether it refers to defective males, a recognised 'third sex', or a variation of gender identity. Zwilling and Sweet state that this term refers to 'feminised males' or transvestites, but distinct from women (2000: 112). Elsewhere they note that 'the class of transvestite singers, dancers, and prostitutes known as *hijras* are the contemporary representatives of the unmales and third sex of earlier times' (1996: 363), explicitly

⁶ Goldberg suggests that the epithet suggests a gender hierarchy since the male Śiva's status is privileged with the title '*īśvara*' ('lord', 'master') while the female Pārvatī is designated as '*nārī*' ('woman') (2002: 1).

linking ancient 'third sex' identity and the modern-day *hijras*. Maintaining an association between ancient and modern identities is significant to contemporary *hijras* in order to authorise a modern identity that has its conceptual origins in antiquity.

Zwilling and Sweet maintain that the Jains offered the most developed theory about a 'third sex'. Prior theories were deemed inadequate because they were based on the absence of primary or secondary sexual characteristics (the 'Brahminical' view), or on the presence or absence of procreative ability (the 'Buddhist' view). Impotence denoted membership of the *napumsaka* category (1996: 365-6).⁷ The Jains were concerned with how underlying sexuality motivated sexual behaviour, providing a more detailed relationship between biological sex, gender role, and sexuality and differentiating between biological sex, or *dravyalinga* [material sexual mark] and psychological state, or *bhayvalinga* [mental sexual mark] (*ibid.*: 367). By the fifth century C.E., the 'masculine' *purusanapumsaka* was differentiated from the feminine *napumsaka* on the grounds of appearance by looking, dressing, and acting as a man (1996: 369-70).⁸ These theories deny an understanding of sex as linked to materiality, allowing the development of a more nuanced theory of gender, sex, and sexuality.

Theorisations concerning a 'third' (and fourth) sex and references to individuals of ambiguous gender and sexuality in classical literature and mythology demonstrate the literary and historical presence of alternative gender identities in India. Modern, variant gender identities in contemporary India construct themselves in reference to these themes and references in ancient, literary sources. *Kinnars* in MP, for example, clearly derived legitimacy from ancient narratives, particularly mythological sources, referencing individuals who had played a prominent role in sacred history (see Hossain 2012). In certain ways, modern subjects can find 'mythological' and 'historical' legitimisation for alternative gender identities in India, by attesting to their existence—and occasional prominence and importance—in ancient times.

ii. *Medieval Sources and European Travel Writing*

References to individuals of a 'third nature' throughout the medieval period of Indian history are more scarce, but what does increase dramatically are references to 'eunuchs' in South Asia, especially in the writings of European travellers to the subcontinent. Several scholars have researched the presence and function of eunuchs in the Islamic world (Ayalon 1999; Marmon 1995; Scholtz 2001), as an extension of medieval travellers' fascination at eunuchs' status and their prominent roles as political

⁷ For the importance of impotence rather than castration, see Zwilling and Sweet 1993: 596, 602.

⁸ Both third and 'fourth' sex individuals were characterized as endowed with both male and female sexualities (Zwilling and Sweet 1996: 372), as bisexual (*ibid.*: 371), and hyperlibidinous (*ibid.*: 372).

advisors, administrators, generals, and guardians of the harem, or female quarters (Reddy 2005: 22). Reddy notes that explicit references to South Asian eunuchs increase with the arrival of Muslim rulers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (*ibid.*), notably in relation to the privilege they enjoyed as members of royal and imperial court culture during the Delhi Sultanate and the later Mughal Empire. Positions of privilege within 'Islamic'⁹ court culture might suggest that *hijras* are granted a means of historical legitimacy insofar as they can identify with 'Islamic' eunuchs and the prestige and position they enjoyed in this period.¹⁰ Both eunuchs and *hijras* are similar in relation to anatomical form, since impotence and/or castration are markers of both identities. While impotence and/or castration means that the eunuchs of medieval India are not *hijras'* biological predecessors, *hijras* gain a measure of legitimation and social tolerance by drawing upon a discourse that refers to the power and prestige once held by court eunuchs, constructing a non-biogenetic genealogy that is not based on procreation and natal families. *Hijras* make this association in order to allude to eunuchs' historical prestige, even if '*hijras*' and 'eunuchs' are not the same in terms of physical being. More important is the position both identities maintain in relation to a normative gender binary, as opposed to the physical 'truth' of their bodies.

Studies of eunuchs in medieval India focus on how eunuchs became valued within courtly practices, concentrating on their social and embodied difference. Often eunuchs were outsiders, brought in from outside the 'empire' and bound to their owners as slaves (Gannon 2009: 163). What is stressed commonly is eunuchs' embodied difference as impotent or castrated individuals, making them trusted and loyal servants due to their inability to pose a sexual threat to women and thus perpetuate their own lineage. Gender-neutral individuals were perceived as being beyond politics that involved self-promotion.¹¹ Ayalon notes that eunuchs rose to positions of power and prominence through the practice of gender-segregation of social spheres, the 'special character of the Muslim slave institution' where non-Arab slaves were bound to their patrons, and to the stereotype of eunuchs as trustworthy and loyal servants who had access to all areas of the population (1999: 15).

⁹ The term 'Islamic' here points to the discursive way in which Islamic notions and discourses were used in particular ways to shore up power and authority, particularly by the Persian/Mughal courts and rulers.

¹⁰ Ironically, Gannon argues that during British rule a semiotic reassignment occurred, in which positive qualities such as trustworthiness, lack of sexual desire, and respectability came to be identified with harem (that is, non-*hijra*) eunuchs, whilst characteristics viewed by the British as negative were attached to the *hijra* (sodomy, begging, dancing, immorality). The *hijra* was defined in contrast and relation to the eunuchs (2009: 162). One argument linking *hijra* and eunuch identity is that the term '*hijra*' is derived from a Persian word, *hiz*, originally meaning 'effeminate', but is used today with the meaning 'lewd' or 'lascivious'. Jaffrey notes that other suggestions of the term's 'etymology' are *hich* and *hichgah* (1997: 143), or *hič* and *hičgāh*, meaning 'not any' and 'nowhere' and 'never' in Middle Persian.

¹¹ Conceptualisations of *hijras* as 'beyond' impropriety and corruption in politics have been revived in regards to contemporary *hijras* in modern Indian politics; I address this representation in Chapters Three and Four.

The presence of eunuchs, especially within the holy cities of Medina and Mecca (see Marmon 1995), greatly disturbed the imagination of the European travellers. Unable to comprehend their anatomical form, gender and sartorial practices, and the prestige that these individuals enjoyed, various authors portrayed eunuchs as 'avaricious', 'licentious', 'barbarous', and generally 'disgusting' individuals.¹² European explanations regarding their prominence pointed to a sexual or gendered function as opposed to a role as trustworthy servants: they guarded the *harem*, because they were not a sexual threat. The racial element became more pointed in the late eighteenth century, causing as much discomfort as their asexuality (see Marmon 1995: 100). Reddy points out that these accounts silence eunuchs' own voices, and reveal as much about the authors and their anxieties—especially regarding bodily modification and the extraordinary prestige given to these particular individuals—as it does about the actual historical practices of eunuchs and courtly traditions (2005: 22, 24).

References to eunuchs are important when considering the textual evidence that provides a historical account of alternative sexualities in India. *Hijra* identity should not be conflated with courtly eunuchs due to differentiations in roles, bodies, and behaviours, nor is *hijra* subjectivity derived solely from the 'Islamic' courtly traditions of eunuchs, due to their attested existence in earlier ancient texts. Yet, a study of the prominent position of the eunuchs within the medieval period adds to an understanding of the construction of the *hijra* identity in modern day India.¹³ *Hijras* are part of the wider tradition of gender ambiguous individuals and the role played by eunuchs provides a further narrative that *hijras* can adopt in their construction of identity. Nanda writes that 'the religious roles of the *hijras*, derived from Hinduism, and the historical role of the eunuchs in the Muslim courts' are 'inextricably entwined'. She argues that while the collapsing of the different roles of *hijras* and eunuchs leads to 'certain contradictions', these contradictions are incorporated into *hijra* culture and it is 'only the Western observer seems to feel the need to separate them conceptually' (1999: 23).

¹² In her novel, *The Invisibles* (1997), Zia Jaffrey includes examples of travellers' accounts, such as those of Niccolo Manucci (1653-1708), François Bernier (1656-68), and James Forbes (1749-1819). Eunuchs are portrayed as having 'extreme covetousness', 'immeasurably avaricious', and 'elated as if they were the greatest men in the world' (1997: 65), 'most licentious' and 'most foul in speech' (66), '[employing] their time in barbarous intrigues' (112), and, writes Forbes: 'I was called...to examine some of these people: my visit was short, and the objects disgusting' (170). Marmon writes that 'the very sight of "whole men" kissing the hands of these "repulsively ugly...startlingly emaciated" sexless creatures' must have been upsetting to Europeans who were uncomfortable with the reverence given to the eunuchs (1995: 95).

¹³ The term 'eunuch' is often used synonymously with the term '*hijra*'. Part of this conflation was due to British classificatory attempts at identifying *hijra* identity; an understanding of *hijras* as eunuchs permeates in modern India. English print media perpetuates such an association, by translating the term '*hijra*' as 'eunuch' and through consistent use of the term 'eunuch'.

iii. *Classification and Criminalisation*

Arguably the most important category of literature that has lasting effects on how *hijras* are perceived in academic scholarship today is that of the colonial period. Shane Gannon writes that ‘colonial depictions’ serve as the very ‘conditions of possibility’ for an academic understanding of the *hijra*, arguing that it is through colonial cataloguing and criminalisation that a conceptual framework has been constructed, through which the academy examines and analyses the *hijra* subject in contemporary scholarship (2009: 104). Evidence from colonial archives presents how *hijra* identity has come to be framed through the perspectives of the colonial administration. Texts from this period emphasise two aspects of the colonial project: (1) a desire to know their ‘subjects’, cataloguing *hijras* as a caste or tribe and classifying them according to religion and gender and (2) an intention to criminalise the *hijra* subject, where a discourse of criminalisation was based upon colonial assessments of the nature of Indian society and influenced by constructions of crime and deviancy within Victorian England.¹⁴

Hijras are listed as a distinct caste or community in several glossaries of the castes and tribes of India, including one compiled in the 1880s that claims it contains ‘a list of all the castes and tribes as returned by the people themselves and entered by the census enumerators’ (Kitt 1885: v; see Crooke 1896). In order to make classification easier, *hijras* were divided occasionally into male and female, as well as Muhammadan and Hindu *hijras*, notably in William Crooke’s observations of the 1891 census (1896: 495).¹⁵ It is not clear whether ‘male’ and ‘female’ *hijras* refers to divisions made by *hijras* themselves according to masculine or feminine roles, or whether ‘female’ *hijras* refers to women who were dependent on differing *hijra* groups (Reddy 2000: 26; see Agrawal 1997). However, the binary framework—male or female, Hindu or Muhammadan—indicates that the classification ‘*hijra*’ was not detailed enough, but was required to be broken down into more ‘essential’ categories that were intelligible to census enumerators and others who would utilise such documents.

Lawrence Preston writes that the British, in their ‘zeal’ to organise social categories, ‘compounded their problems of *hijra* history with false distinctions’. He notes that in reality, the *hijra* community seems to have borrowed ‘rather freely from the cumulative social backgrounds’ of its members’ (1987: 376). The British, in their classificatory attempts, might also, therefore, have unwittingly cultivated notions of ‘authenticity’ among *hijras* themselves. Discourse on the ‘nature’ of *hijras* stated that

¹⁴ Knowledge, Bernard S. Cohn argues, ‘enabled the British to classify, categorize, and bound the vast social world that was India so that it could be controlled’ (1996: 5).

¹⁵ Lawrence Preston recounts that Goldsmid of Indapur, the Assistant Collector to the Collector of Pune in 1836, recorded that although the *hijras* came from any caste, upon emasculation, they ‘take the names of Musselmanee women, and as such, live and are buried’ (1987: 376). He writes that prior religious or caste status before entry to the *hijra* community did not seem to be problematic and that Hindu and Muslim *hijras* were perceived as alike in all respects ‘except they did not interdine’ (*ibid.*).

there were three types of *hijra*: 'naturally impotent men', males born with 'congenital malformation', and 'artificial' or 'self-made eunuchs' (Reddy 2005: 28). This was an elaboration on the stated difference between natural eunuchs known as '*khasua*', and artificial eunuchs like the *hijras* (Preston 1987: 374, quoting Russell 1916). Preston notes that the term '*khasua*' is presumably from the Arabic '*khasi*', which properly refers to 'created' eunuchs, particularly those who had only their testicles removed, and this differs from the colonial use of the term to mean 'natural eunuch'.

The second aspect of the colonial project was the British intention to criminalise the *hijra* subject. Gannon writes that from the 1850s onwards, accounts about *hijras* begin to reveal a larger institutional anxiety figured predominantly 'as a legal concern, in terms of inheritance, sodomy, castration, extortion, and trafficking in children' (2009: 126, 139-157). The British administration criminalised *hijra* practices, including homosexuality and the emasculation operation in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860 in Section 320 on 'grievous' hurt and Section 377 on carnal intercourse 'against the order of nature'. As an extension of their 'criminal practices', *hijras* were described as a 'criminal caste' under an amendment to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, 'An Act for the Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs' (1897). This statute classified as 'eunuchs' people of the male sex who admit themselves as impotent or appear to be impotent upon medical inspection (Clause 24).¹⁶ Local governments were to keep a register of the names and residences of all eunuchs who had committed 'offences' under Section 377 (IPC) (relating to sex 'against the order of nature') and those who were 'reasonably suspected' of kidnapping or castrating children (Clause 24A). The People's Union for Civil Liberties (Karnataka) states:

Being a eunuch was itself a criminal enterprise, with surveillance being the everyday reality. The surveillance mechanism criminalized the quotidian reality of a eunuch's existence by making its manifest sign, i.e., cross-dressing a criminal offence. Further, the ways in which eunuchs earned their livelihood, i.e., singing and dancing, was criminalised. Thus, every aspect of the eunuch's existence was subject to surveillance, premised on the threat of criminal action. The police thus became an overt and overwhelming presence in the lives of eunuchs. Further, the very concept of personhood of eunuchs was done away with through disempowering them from basic rights such as making a gift or adopting a son.

(2003: 45)

By the early twentieth century, many sections of this act extended to the whole of British India (Reddy 2005: 26). Joseph Bockrath notes that the 'criminalization of virtually every characteristic and expression of a group [is not] far from making the status itself a crime' (2003: 87).

Criminalising 'eunuchs' entailed the construction of a category and the collection of a body of knowledge which defined the characteristics and practices of

¹⁶ The Act also made provision for individuals to request to be removed from the register of eunuchs (Clause 25).

India's 'eunuchs' (Reddy 2005: 27). Similar to the way caste identity was passed through generations, it was assumed that criminal traits were passed on through 'criminal castes'. Notions of *hijras*' criminality were legitimised by the nature of the work that *hijras* performed. Alongside their traditional work, some *hijras* engaged in sexual practices, described by one Assistant Collector as being 'of a nature too revolting to be mentioned' (Preston 1987: 377). Engaging in sexual practices legitimised the moral condemnation of the *hijra* caste. In order to deter and penalise potential recruits and current community members, the British enacted laws to criminalise eunuchs' means of survival. By criminalising homosexuality in Section 377 (IPC), *hijras* could not practice prostitution and benefit economically. Moreover, by criminalising the emasculation operation (which ensured 'full' membership of the group), *hijras* could not admit new members. A further denial was the removal of their claims to public revenues through grants of cash and land, which they had enjoyed under previous rulers (Preston 1987: 372).¹⁷ The British eliminated this practice by transforming begging rights into life holdings for the current incumbents (*ibid.*: 383), so that *hijras* no longer begged with the explicit sanction of the government and were forced into the urban underworld, which included the practices of illegal begging and prostitution (*ibid.*: 387; Reddy 2005: 27).

The classification of *hijras* as criminal subjects reflects how the British viewed their purpose in India, by putting an end to 'barbarous practices' (Preston 1987: 372) and focusing their attention on social progress (*ibid.*: 379). 'Progress' included the criminalisation and moral condemnation of specific caste groups, presumably with a view to reforming subjects and 'ending the excesses of the deluded' (*ibid.*: 372, 379). Legislative and moral actions were enforced through British political dominance. Political and social dominance theoretically extended to sexual dominance: all forms of Indian sexuality were perceived as inferior to British sexuality and there were attempts to reform Indian sexuality, so that it adhered to 'rightful' notions of Victorian morality. The link drawn between these forms of power justified British colonisation, in turn reinforcing the British dominant form of masculinity, especially over forms of sexuality that deviated from the two-sex model (Gannon 2009: 203). Yet, the masquerade of British hyper-masculinity was contingent upon the 'effeminacy' and weakness of the colonised subject, both women and men (Reddy 2005: 29). Colonial classification of the 'eunuch' paralleled Orientalist notions of the other as sexually corrupt, effeminate, and morally degraded. 'Eunuchs' were thus produced as a category in the colonial imagination, along with associated characteristics and acts. The colonial imagination had a profound impact on the way in which *hijras* are studied and classified, providing

¹⁷ Gannon discusses Act No. XI of 1852 which removed *hijras*' right to grants of land held without rent (*inams*) in the Bombay Presidency, because observing conditions of tenure was considered against the laws of the land and public decency, highlighting *hijras*' immorality (2009).

the conceptual framework, historical documentation, and conceptions of the *hijra* subject upon which later scholarship was based.

iv. Hijras as Sexed and Gendered Subjects

An increasing interest in policing the eunuch subject in India was motivated by and entwined with the development of the European discipline of sexology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Classificatory and criminalisation schemes employed during British colonialism were informed by an anthropological interest in sexual and gender variance in the non-European world, used to both shore up and contradict Western sexological projects.

From around 1860, studies on sexuality were prompted by physical and cultural anthropology. Although supposedly detached from the moral rhetoric of religious authorities, the discourse of sexology developed as part of a wider project concerned with social hygiene and order, in which class, race, and gender were regulated, regulating potentially threatening behaviour from the laboring poor, educated women, prostitution, homosexual subcultures, and the tropicalisation of Europeans in the colonies (Bleys 1996: 145-151). Scientists and physicians enjoyed greater authority, although discourses remained conservative in upholding traditional beliefs and tempering public opinion. A theory of sexual psychopathology was developed in which sexual anomalies were relocated to the human brain, rather than being viewed as a bodily disorder (*ibid.*: 145-6). The representation of same-sex behaviour changed, from an act to an identity, where same-sex behaviour derived from a permanent condition; as Michel Foucault writes, 'the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (1978: 43).

Evolutionary theory was supplemented by a theory of 'degeneration', Rudi Bleys argues, built upon Lamarckian theory concerning the inheritability of acquired characteristics, in which deviations from normality increase in time, from an initially perfect state (1996: 152). Such a theory influenced public debates on race, class, and increasingly the study of gender and sexuality, intertwining all three domains within the logic of 'progress'. Sexual disorders were interpreted as a process of mental disorientation, although there was little consensus as to whether deviant sexuality reflected a more primitive state of being or was a response to historical and social circumstances. Despite disagreement as to its ontology, the theory functioned as a guideline for social policy in which deviation was seen as a symbol of social decay (*ibid.*: 155-6).

Theoretical innovation about sexual 'deviancy' required clarification regarding the manifestation of such practices among other races, as well as in relation to newly defined 'sexual minorities' in Europe. Theorisations were confirmed through

ethnographic evidence, resulting in the further regulation of sexuality within Europe and overseas. Bleys notes that the mapping of 'homosexual vice', however, remained fraught with ambiguity and contradiction (1996: 146). Whilst homosexuality was defined as a 'perversion', sexologists were unable to produce a universal theory clarifying sexual variance. Instead, from a position of moral reticence and theoretical disagreement, they produced *ad hoc*, descriptive narratives, which 'revealed' a lack of morality among indigenous people, reflecting European discourse on their 'otherness'. Yet, an ideological comparison was drawn between sexual 'deviant' individuals in Europe and abroad, with 'primitivity' (through sexual deviancy) serving as 'the definitional buttress to the term "civilized"' (Hoad 2000: 147). As Neville Hoad writes, a position on 'the fringes of the normative evolutionary narrative' is shared by both the European 'decadent/degenerate' and the 'primitive', despite sequential issues as to their common existence among both 'the backward savages of the present and in the advanced cultures of Europe's past' (2000: 137).

The ambiguous image of homosexual deviance provided through ethnographic narratives—as 'both a degenerative syndrome *away from* an original, heterosexual drive, and a regression *into* an original, "polymorph" sexuality' (Bleys 1996: 189)—reflected differing theories about homosexual identity in the West. Moreover, such ambiguity could be beneficial: Hoad argues that groups could mobilise unstable narratives, both to stigmatise homosexuality further and to depathologise and decriminalise it (*ibid.*: 139). Ethnographic data concerning 'primitive' people in the colonies—despite attempting to erase its colonial influence by describing 'authentic indigenous cultures' (see Cohn 1996: 11ff)—played an important role in reconstructing the evolutionary theorisation that posited the white European as the most advanced subspecies and thus was linked directly to the European civilising mission in understanding the primitive state of promiscuity (in which promiscuity is seen as a defining attribute of the 'primitive') (Bleys 1996: 160-1; Hoad 2000: 142). Same-sex practitioners were portrayed as hedonistic and egocentric; evidence from multiple locations corroborated an image of the universal deviance of primitive people, at the same time as demonstrating how such practices were essentially different from European homosexuality (Bleys 1996: 191). Same-sex praxis was seen as a sign of the lower status of non-Western people, who occupied a lower position on the evolutionary scale, a characteristic trait, such that these practices were viewed as inferior to white sexuality. Racist discourse, Bleys argues, posited 'endemic' homosexuality to indigenous people and reserved a 'minority' model in relation to the West, conceptualising same-sex sexual practice as both a sign of inferior evolutionary status and of degenerate heritage or circumstance (*ibid.*: 192). Both theories of evolution and degeneration called for anthropological data and cultural surveys, which justified social policy and regulation, despite the

impossibility of generalising about indigenous practices to serve evolutionary theory and pathologise homosexuality.

An anthropological interest in sexual variance has continued in the aftermath of the 'age of empire'. Hoad writes that narratives and deep rhetorical patterns have maintained the problematic universalism at the core of evolutionary narratives, such that they pervade various contexts today, including gay cultural self-representation and the international politics of homosexual identity (2000: 147). Likewise in academia, an interest in sexual and gender variance in the non-European world has been maintained and this can be demonstrated in relation to *hijra* identity. Scholarship on the *hijras* has primarily focused on their sexed or gender ambiguity. Early literature distinguished between sexual practice and religious or ritual practice, such as the Carstairs/Opler debate that concerned itself with the sexual and 'professional' identity of *hijras* (Carstairs 1957, 1960; Opler 1960, 1961). Both agreed that *hijras* were castrated or penectomised men who dressed as women, but Carstairs argued that the *hijras* were prostitutes, while Opler thought they were ritual specialists and devotees of Bahuchara Mata. Scholarship in the 1960s to 1980s took a more ethnographic approach, examining social factors such as organisational practices and recruitment, ultimately positioning *hijras* as 'deviant' individuals (Shah 1961; Sinha 1967; Sharma 1989).

Scholarship in the past twenty years has framed *hijra* subjectivity within the debate of sexual difference, sexual ambiguity, and binary categorisation. *Hijras* are portrayed as an archetypal example of a 'third sex' or 'third gender' and are compared with other 'third' sex or gender groups such as the two-spirit of North America, the *kathoey* of Thailand, the *xanith* of Oman, the *mahu* of Tahiti, and the *fa'afafine* of Samoa.¹⁸ Alternative gender roles are contrasted with the Anglo-European binary-gender system, often suggesting a 'Western intolerance' for sexual ambiguity and gender variation (Herdt 1994; Nanda 1999). Kira Hall argues that this sort of third-sex writing is a product of feminist rethinkings of gender in the 1970s and 1980s. A challenge to the dichotomous notion of gender influenced anthropological literature, as it sought to demonstrate how notions of gender are constructed psychologically, socially, and discursively in Western culture. Since gender and sexuality was constructed plurally in non-Western cultures (1995: 26), interest turned towards the study of 'third sex' groups, challenging the hegemony of Western notions of binary gender. However, anthropologists had to prove the validity of alternative categories, showing that 'these existences were both culturally recognised and socially integrated' (*ibid.*: 27). It is thus unsurprising that anthropologists portrayed alternative genders as plural and

¹⁸ Kath Weston argues that the use of 'indigenous' categories in a discussion of local practices is 'no more neutral in its effects' than earlier, less reflective use of the term 'homosexuality' to generalise various forms of same-sex practice. She argues that the use of 'foreign' terms constructs the subject as 'always and already other', and is implicated in a new form of orientalism where linguistic terms 'subtly reify differences and buttress ethnographic authority' (1998: 158-9).

liberating: Hall argues that an 'intellectual desire for the existence of plurality, coupled with an anthropological interest in the exotic over the familiar, has led to skewed representations of the cultural value placed on alternative gender identities' (*ibid.*: 28). A history of the methodology of 'third sex analysis'¹⁹ explains how 'third sex' identity came to be conceptualised as liberatory and multiple, which may ignore the harsh realities faced by individuals in everyday life.

One work that exemplifies the category of 'third sex analysis' is Serena Nanda's well-known ethnography, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (1999). Originally published in 1990, Nanda's ethnography focused on *hijras*' personal narratives, presenting them as 'full human beings'. The exclusion that *hijras* face on a daily basis, from their natal families and wider society, is evident throughout the book. Yet Hall critiques Nanda for occasionally giving a 'false impression of the status allotted to these ambiguously sexed figures' (1995: 30), by celebrating their ritual status, which suggests they might be privileged and honoured in society, contradicting their narratives of marginalisation. The second edition, published in 1999, included as the final chapter, 'The *Hijras* in Cross-Cultural Perspective'. Nanda writes that revision was necessary, given new cross-cultural work on gender variation, historical work on third genders in ancient Indian texts, and ethnography among *hijras*, praising the ground-breaking work done by Gilbert Herdt in *Third Sex, Third Gender* (1994) on the diversity of alternative gender roles (xii). However, Reddy points out that despite the caveat in Herdt's introduction that an 'emphasis on the *third* category is merely a heuristic device that stands in for the possibility of multiple categories', many chapters in Herdt's volume emphasise 'thirdness' as the solution to the sexual dimorphism question (2005: 32). An emphasis on 'thirdness' is found in Nanda's chapter in Herdt's book, as well as in *Neither Man nor Woman*. In the final chapter, she writes:

in my view, the hijras are an *institutionalized third gender role* that has its roots in ancient India, and that has been strengthened by the historical role of the eunuchs in the Mughal Courts...I believe [Zwilling and Sweet's] meticulous analysis of ancient Jain and Hindu texts supports the view that the hijras are a *separate sex/gender*, which is, however, *marginal rather than equal* to male and female.²⁰ In comparison with other (non-Western) cultures, particularly, the hijras stand out as a well-defined, culturally and socially acknowledged, organizationally set apart, ritually specialized, historically continuous, sex/gender variation.

(1999: 144; my emphasis)

While Nanda highlights that *hijras* are a 'marginal' sex/gender, who are 'not equal' to male and female, they are described as a 'well defined, culturally and socially acknowledged...sex/gender variation'. Nanda's 'third sex analysis' posits *hijras* as an

¹⁹ I borrow this term from Gayatri Reddy (2005: 31).

²⁰ Nanda notes that this conclusion—*hijras* as a separate sex/gender—is not the conclusion given by Zwilling and Sweet, who conclude that the third gender is 'ambiguous' (see 1996: 362). However, she employs their analysis to support her conclusion of the possibility of a separate sex/gender (1999: 144).

institutionalised and alternative sex/gender and provokes reflection on the Western belief that there are only 'two sexes and two genders, each naturally and permanently biologically determined' (*ibid.*: xi).

'Third sex' analysis is useful in highlighting cross-cultural variation of sexual difference and questions the potentially harmful Western framework of binary sex and gender. However, several critiques have been raised. First, a study into the existence of third sex categories does not necessarily challenge the dichotomy between sex and gender. Nanda herself recognises this problem in analysing comparative cultural constructions of gender variation in relation to the degree of differentiation in a particular culture and to the cultural concept of the person (*ibid.*: 145-149). She argues that Hindu gender ideology admits overlap, providing greater flexibility in admitting alternative genders (*ibid.*: 145), despite differentiated and hierarchical gender roles for men and women. Yet, gender diversity does not necessarily challenge the dichotomy between sex and gender by virtue of its existence. As Nanda notes, they are marginal, rather than equal, to male and female. Thus, as Anuja Agrawal states, the 'thirdness' of the *hijra* is not transgressive, since 'a third gender appears to have come into being only through a cultural institution of a third body' (1997: 294).

The second critique of third sex analysis is that it ignores individuals' lived experience. Lawrence Cohen argues that authors who employ the label ignore the violence done to members of this category (1995). The academic reverence given to 'third' identities, liberated from a dichotomous gender binary, might ignore the prejudice and marginalisation experienced by 'third' individuals. *Hijras'* own experiences within the rigidly enforced binary gender system in India might be ignored, as well as individual gender constructions in response to the system. While Nanda describes the *hijras* as 'neither man nor woman' based on *hijras'* self-designation, Hall writes that this is only part of the picture. In her interviewees' narratives, collected during fieldwork in Banaras in 1993, Hall notes that *hijras* viewed themselves as 'deficiently' masculine and 'incompletely' feminine' (1995: 31). During fieldwork in MP, the majority of *kinnars* I encountered identified as female *kinnars*, adopting feminine speech patterns,²¹ and sartorial and behavioural patterns. While it did not appear that they saw themselves as 'incompletely' feminine, *kinnars* had a clear notion of what it meant to have and perform a specific gender, particularly femininity, and emphasised such behaviour. The construction of *hijra* gender identity is in response to a rigidly enforced system that challenges *hijras'* gender presentation, in which *hijras* negotiate their own identities and make individual identifications, through self-pronouns,

²¹ While it is beyond the remit of this thesis, Kira Hall has done excellent work on linguistic patterns among the *hijras* (1995). Hall argues that the use of gendered linguistic markers is more complex, where *hijras* alternate between feminine and masculine speech for identifiable reasons and that such use was not 'random' (see Nanda 1990: 17). Language, Hall writes, reflects a lifestyle 'that is constantly self-defining', in the effort through which *hijras* gender themselves (1995: 56). Hall also discusses *hijras'* use of their own 'code' language (1995: 175ff).

appearance, and behaviour.²² By labelling *hijras* as a 'third sex', *hijras*' own designations of self through speech, behaviour, and gender performance in relation to established, binary gender systems are ignored and the nuances of their gender performance disregarded.

A third critique is that the label 'third sex' homogenises those who occupy the subject position. Cohen notes that many individuals identified as 'third' are different and experience gender differently (1995). Gayatri Reddy's excellent ethnography explicitly recognises this variation. She emphasises the importance of 'variations of thirdness', which differ according to the 'temporal, spatial, and life-historical positioning' of the individual actors involved (2005: 45). She suggests a spectrum of identities within 'thirdness' with differentiations made between individuals as to how they become 'third', how they construct their identities, and how they enact them. In a further critique, Reddy maintains that variations of thirdness are embodied within other axes of difference, such that 'third sex analyses' only serve to reify the study of sexuality as a monolithic field. She argues that 'third sex' analyses, while admirable in illustrating the cultural context of third-sex differentiation, have ignored the intersections of sexuality with other modes of difference by effectively separating the 'domain of sexuality from that of political economy and the analysis of other axes of identity', thus 'limiting its usefulness as an articulation of the complexity of everyday life' (*ibid.*: 32). Thus, other axes of identity and modes of practice must be explored in relation to the study of sexuality (*ibid.*: 35).

With these critiques in mind, I want, in the remainder of this chapter, to focus on other aspects of *hijra* identity that are separate but inherently intertwined with gender, sexuality, and sexual practices, including religious and social practices. First, I turn to discuss *hijras*' gender and sexed identity, acknowledging that these aspects of *hijras*' identities are inextricably bound up and constituted through engagement with other facets of their identity, including regional location, caste, class, and religious identity. These intersections between various axes of difference configure multi-dimensional and complex structurings of subjectivities collated under the category '*hijra*'.

II. Performing Gender

Scholarship on the *hijras* reveals the assumption that '*hijra*' identity is an identity that is always gendered, as an alternative to male and female. The figure of the *hijra* is represented as marked by a divergent gender identity (Suresh 2011: 379) and

²² As Hall puts it: 'instead of occupying a position outside the male-female binary, *hijras* have created an existence within it, one that is constrained by rigidly entrenched cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity' (1995: 12-13).

scholarship has conceptualised them, first and foremost, as gendered beings, seeking to theorise or explain their sexual behaviour or practices, gender performance, and sex/gender identity. First, I explore some of the variations among *kothi* (receptive MSM identities) sexual identities in India, analysing Reddy's 'sexual cartography' of Hyderabad. I discuss her theorisations of various MSM identities, since the question of *hijra* identity and its relation to other forms of MSM identity in MP was not a focal question for my thesis. I then consider corporeal and performative practice specific to *hijra* identity and consider how these practices are conceptualised in relation to discourses of authenticity.

Euro-centric scholarship on gender and sexuality, particularly that of Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, can add to a theorisation of *hijra* gender identity. I discussed above Halberstam's work on the multiplicity of female masculinities. Halberstam calls for new affirmations of 'different gender taxonomies', which may or may not engage with conventional gender norms (1998: 9). *Hijras'* gender performance, in turn, engages with conventional norms but also inhabits and subverts them, such that their performance might not be seen simply as mimicry, given the idiosyncratic adoption of such norms. Moreover, Butler's and Halberstam's work on the performance of gender identity can inform a study of *hijra* identity. By focusing on the construction of gender in relation to heteronormative standards and the social policing of gender practices, both authors point to the ways in which gender performance may be recognised and accepted, or subverted and ignored; a distinction which is also clear in *hijras'* gendered practices as they negotiate conventional norms and their own disruptive behaviour. Butler's work on performance, in particular, is useful in theorising the performativity of identity. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argues that the materiality of the body is bound up with signification (1993: 30), such that there is no essence that defines the gendered subject; rather, the subject appears naturalised through the productive power of the reiterated practice, constituting the materiality of the body's sex and sexual difference, according to a heterosexual imperative (*ibid.*: 2). Yet, the apparent stability of the subject is, in fact, destabilised through the repetition of norms, creating a possible crisis in which Butler rejoices, since subjects might, through recognising the production of norms and their political interests, be able to serve different political aims and allow for a radical resignification of such norms (*ibid.*: 30). Her work, therefore, informs conceptions of how bodies are constructed through repeated practice, highlighting modes of resistance within discursive practice that allow for competing valuations of different bodies (*ibid.*: 22). Her theorisations can inform a study of *hijra* identity, particularly in identifying how gender identity—indeed, all identity—is processually brought into being, and the radical potential that different bodies might have, at the same time that they shore up and reify conventional norms.

i. *Variations among the 'Third Sex'*

Differentiations exist among the *hijras*, in physical, practical, and conceptual terms. According to a definition by Vinay Lal, the *hijras* are described in variously scholarly and popular literature alike as:

eunuchs, transvestites, homosexuals, bisexuals, hermaphrodites, androgynes, transsexuals, and gynemimetics; and as if this multiplicity of terms were not enough, they are also referred to as people who are intersexed, emasculated, impotent, transgendered, castrated, effeminate, or somehow sexually anomalous or dysfunctional.

(1999: 119)²³

The term encompasses a variety of practices and identifications relating to sexual orientation, sexuality, and anatomical form. While the majority of *hijras* were once, or still are, anatomically male, most identify as women, performing stereotypically feminine behaviour, and adopting feminine sartorial and speech patterns, yet *hijras* acknowledge that they are categorically distinct from women. The term '*hijra*' is widely used across India, but *hijras* are also identified by terms such as transgender, MSM, and 'eunuchs' (particularly by the mainstream media). In separate states of India *hijras* adopt variant terms, such as *kinnar* in the states of MP and Gujarat and *aravani*, or more recently *tirunankai*, in Tamil Nadu. The translation of the term *hijra* or *kinnar* in English is as 'eunuch' or 'hermaphrodite', although these are not interchangeable terms.

Hijra subjectivity remains physically and conceptually impossible to pin down, due to the wide variation of bodily and gendered practices associated with the *hijra* subject. Reddy's definition of gender roles in Hyderabad—based on bodily praxis rather than anatomy—aids understanding as to *hijra* positionality in the sex/gender spectrum. She proposes a tripartite gender system: '*pantis*' (penetrative, 'masculine' men), '*kotis*' (receptive, 'effeminate' men),²⁴ and '*nārans*' (all women), with the latter two positions on the same side of the 'gender divide' (2005: 44).²⁵ While Reddy acknowledges that 'performative aspects of bodily practice are extremely important' in theorising gender difference, she asserts that the criteria of difference in identity configuration and their significance in an individual's life will vary according to the

²³ Nanda includes 'women who do not menstruate' (1994: 380; 1999: 18). Her definition points to *hijras*' inability to fulfill normative procreative roles.

²⁴ Reddy writes that the word '*koti*' in Telugu literally means 'monkey'. *Hijras* in Hyderabad could not explain its etymology and Reddy notes the term probably has no relation to the Telugu term, but might allude 'to someone who 'swings from branch to branch with multiple partners, much like a monkey'. She suggests that the term probably derives from a Kannada term for dancer and in general terms implies an effeminate man (2005: 243 n. 4). Elsewhere in academic and LGBT discourse, '*koti*' is also spelt '*kothi*'.

²⁵ 'Women' were explicitly separate from effeminate men. '*Nāran*' was a generic term to include all women, viewed as categorically different through their ability to bear children.

‘temporal, spatial, and life-historical positioning of the actors’ (*ibid.*: 45). Through an examination of various *koti* identities in Hyderabad, Reddy avoids a simplistic understanding of gender difference in terms of sexual performance only, which the personification of *hijras* as a ‘third-sex’ maintains by representing *hijras* as primarily sexed individuals. An exploration of the intersections of sexual difference with, and in relation to, other axes of difference, reveals how identities are negotiated and contested at different times and for different purposes. Reddy analyses what she terms the ‘sexual cartographies’ of Hyderabad, including general *koti*, *hijra*, *zenāna*, and *kaḍa-cāṭla koti* identities, as well as *jogins* and *śiva-satis*, AC/DCs, and *berūpias*.²⁶ These identities are located within a spectrum of *koti* identity, involving negotiations between identities that indicate both difference and similarities. Moreover, potential mobility between categories complicates subject positions.

Many *kotis* explained their effeminate role as a result of having been ‘spoiled’ at a young age, referring to experiences as receptive partners in sexual relationships with men. Being ‘spoiled’ referred to the desire to perform this role in sex or that they were spoiled for future heterosexual intercourse (Reddy 2005: 46-7; Nanda 1999: 176-7). Reddy argues that *kotis* are differentiated from other men because ‘all *kotis* desire *pantis*’, although the manner of their relationship and interaction with *pantis*—and the degree to which particular *kotis* adhered to the rhetoric of asexuality—differed according to individuals (Reddy 2005: 47). *Kotis* (including *hijras*) can be married and have children due to social obligation. Individual sexual practice was dependent on status and ‘place in life’: generally, younger *kotis*—particularly *hijras*—thought it important to have their own *panti*, but sexual practice was denied among older *hijras*, who drew emphatically upon discourses of asceticism and renunciation (*ibid.*: 48). While I did not discuss sexual relationships with my *kinnar* interviewees, relationships between *hijras* and men were intimated through discussions, with older *hijras*, particularly *gurus* and *nāyaks* (senior leaders of the *hijra* houses), frowning upon the practice.

Reddy discusses five *koti* identities: *hijra*, *zenāna*, *kaḍa-cāṭla koti*, *jogin*, and *śiva-sati*, ‘differentiated on the basis of idealized asexuality, dress, kinship patterns, religion, “respectability”, and the centrality of the body to their understanding of self’ (*ibid.*: 52-3). She discusses interaction, dual-membership, and mobility between groups. Membership of distinct categories involved evaluations of authenticity, hierarchy, and socio-economic and class differences. *Hijras* are sari-wearing (*cāṭla*) *kotis*, who exaggerate female behaviour, are identifiable in the public sphere, and form their own communities. *Hijras* argue that their historical legitimation places them above the other *koti* identities. *Zenāna kotis*, in contrast, seem like ‘normal’ men, indistinguishable from

²⁶ These are Reddy’s terms drawn from *hijras*’ and *kotis*’ self-definitions relating to the *koti-panti* spectrum of identities, in which *hijras* see themselves as akin to other ‘alternative sexual identities’ described under the term ‘*koti*’.

pantis in clothing and behaviour; many are married. Among other *zenāna*, their speech and gestures change, acting like *hijras*. Most *zenānas* are affiliated with a *hijra* house and have a symbolic structure among themselves, distinguishing them from other *kotis* and giving them a measure of respect in *hijras*' eyes (*ibid.*: 59-63). The *kaḍa-cāṭla kotis*, or non-sari-wearing *kotis* are referred to as 'kings by day, queens by night'. They have no affiliation to *hijra* houses but enjoy 'homosex' and identify themselves as 'in this line for the sex and excitement' (*ibid.*: 64). Sexual desire is their singular identifying criteria and allows identification with transnational gay communities due to an emphasis on sexual practice (*ibid.*: 64). The *kaḍa-cāṭla kotis* were the most numerous *koti* identity in Hyderabad, who disparaged *hijras* for their lack of global awareness. Many are married with families and are wary about revealing their alternative life (*ibid.*: 63-67). The last two *koti* identities, *jogins* and *śiva-satis*, are self-identified *kotis*, but distinguish themselves on account of their explicit religious identification as Hindus, whereas *hijras* and other *kotis* in Hyderabad identify as Muslim (*ibid.*: 68). *Jogins* wear female clothing, are ascetic, and are 'married' to the goddess; conversely, *śiva-satis* are often married and have families. Both groups claim a status almost level to *badhāī* (ritual work) *hijras* and many had 'official' affiliations with *hijra* houses (*ibid.*: 67-72). Two further groups exist in the Hyderabad context: AC/DCs and *berūpias*. *Hijras* disparaged AC/DCs, calling them 'double trick *gāṇḍus*', because of both receptive and penetrative practice in same-sex intercourse.²⁷ These individuals were reviled by *hijras*, especially those who had the *nirvāṇ* ('rebirth') operation and saw themselves as of higher status. Reddy writes that gaining information about this group was difficult because *hijras* were reluctant to acknowledge them: this disregard reveals how *hijras* construct their identity in contrast to AC/DC identity (*ibid.*: 72), where AC/DCs were depicted as engaging in all sex, while *hijras* had no desire for bodily pleasure (*ibid.*: 83, 89). Another disparaged group were *berūpias* ('people of a different form/face'): men who were *pantis* by behavioural definition, but imitated *koti* identity in gender performance. They were considered the most deviant, insofar as they were represented as 'impersonating' them and 'stealing' *hijra* earnings (*ibid.*: 54, 72). These individuals are sometimes referred to by *hijra* groups as 'fake *hijras*'. Again *berūpia* identity reveals *hijras*' self-constructions of identity: *berūpias* transgress the distinction between *koti* and *panti* and the performative gender boundary without the female attributes that justify *hijras*' identity performance (*ibid.*: 73). *Hijras* construct themselves as definitively 'not *pantis*' and represent themselves as above other *kotis* through asexuality, performance of ritual work, proper community and dress, and historical legitimation. Thus, *berūpias* and AC/DCs are depicted as 'false' and 'inauthentic' *koti* identities since they 'pretend' to perform *koti* identity, or by engaging in sexual practices that contradict *koti* practices.

²⁷ *Kotis* without an affiliation to a *hijra* house are sometimes called '*gāṇḍus*', a term derived from *gāṇḍ* (ass), thus, 'one who uses his ass'. '*Gāṇḍu*' is a highly pejorative term and used in abusive or humorous contexts (Reddy 2005: 64).

Narratives of 'false' identity and comparisons between different levels of 'authentic' identity exist in the negotiations among these *koti* groups. Individual ideas regarding 'authenticity' frame these negotiations and explain the variations in 'third' sex identity. Sexual performance alone is insufficient to explain *koti* identity, since this identity category is revealed as differentiated through different facets of identity including religion, performance, sartorial considerations, and respectability.

ii. *Gender Within a Binary*

Kira Hall argues that *hijras* have created an existence within a normative gender binary, 'rigidly constrained by cultural constructions' of femininity and masculinity (1995: 13). A negotiation of normative male or female bodily and performance norms is evidenced through *hijras*' corporeal and gendered practices. Hall writes that *hijras* 'seem to view themselves as "deficiently" masculine and "incompletely" feminine' (*ibid.*: 31), suggesting a negotiation of gender identity within a binary system. It is within, and with respect to, this framework that I explore various identifications in *hijra* gender construction, including both explicitly feminine and idiosyncratically *hijra* elements. I focus explicitly on performative aspects of gender, including corporeal, sartorial, and behavioural performance.

The first aspect of *hijra* identity is a rejection of normative constructions of 'masculinity'. This repeated narrative, found in many *hijras*' descriptions of themselves, is often based on 'anatomical proof': the imperfection or absence of a penis (Nanda 1999: 15). Deficiency is a marker of authenticity: if the *hijra* had undergone the *nirvāṇ* operation, emasculation is the proof of being a 'real' *hijra*.²⁸ Imperfection or dysfunction is usually claimed prior to the operation to assert their status as 'deficiently masculine' and thus to justify their status as a *hijra* (see Nanda 1999: 15; Reddy 2005: 92).²⁹ According to Reddy, impotence was used to legitimate the decision to have the operation (2005: 93). The operation serves as proof of the absolute asexuality of the *hijras*. Most of the *hijras* I interviewed explained that they were 'born' this way and identified as female *kinnars*. 'Born this way' meant that they were not born as 'normal' males, with a functional male organ, or were born intersexed. However there was a strict distinction between 'male' and 'female' *kinnars* in MP. On one occasion, I met a 'male' *kinnar*, with a male name. He did not explicitly identify himself to me as 'male',

²⁸ Hossain disputes emasculation as a marker of *hijra* identity, citing evidence from Bangladesh, where *hijras* who successfully conceal their penises are as celebrated as emasculated *hijras* (2012: 497).

²⁹ This reasoning also alludes to historical references and to the colonial era, where impotence was seen as proof of eunuch status, for example, in the Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs Act (Act 27) of 1897. Absence of genitalia is not the marker of eunuch status but 'impotence'.

but wore 'male' clothing (that is, trousers and shirt) and had his hair cropped short like a man's might be.

In their rejection of 'maleness', most *hijras* adopt or mimic stereotypically female attributes. Nair writes that the *hijras*

go to great lengths to bear the appearance of women, clothed in female attire and painfully plucking facial hair...to maintain the requisite look of hairless femininity. Photographs indicate that most *hijras* do, in fact, look like women. Or, to put it in a more nuanced fashion, they fulfill our criteria of what a female-gendered person must look like.

(2000: 40)

Most *hijras* adopt explicitly 'feminine' attributes, including wearing female clothing, jewellery, and make up, and keeping their hair long and faces 'hairless': all corporeal modifications indicating a deliberate adherence to assumed feminine norms.

'Superficial' feminine elements emphasise an affiliation with female identity, a wish to be seen as 'someone else' through the non-verbal communication of appearance (Suthrell 2004: 81). Reddy writes that wearing saris distinguishes *hijras* most visibly in the public sphere (2005: 54-5, 131) and Nanda notes that style of clothing may vary according to the custom of the region, writing that in the North they might wear the *śalvār qamīz* [loose garment and trousers] or even Western fashions (1999: 17). I observed this to be the case in MP: most *kinnars* wore *śalvār qamīz*, although many wore saris at certain events. Nanda also considers the factor of age, observing that 'middle-aged *hijras* wear more conservative clothing, often donning white rather than boldly coloured saris' (*ibid.*: 126), perhaps conscious of their status within their community; this sartorial performance might also indicate ascetic practice. In MP, older *kinnars* and those higher in status wore simple, plain clothing compared to other (especially younger) *kinnars* who wore bright colours with embellishments. Older *kinnars* often covered their heads with their *dupaṭṭās*, the scarf worn with *śalvār qamīz*, especially in public or when men were present, assuming a more modest appearance. Ahonaa Roy argues that a *hijra's* choice of dress is part of the construction of the body in relation to her performances: dress presents the body as gendered, representing the act they want to perform, such as sex work or begging (2012: 62). She states that western dress among the *hijras* of Mumbai often reflects the commercial (and therefore 'modern') demands of sex work (*ibid.*).

Hijras wear jewellery and observe feminine adornment practices such as nose and ear piercing. Both accentuate their femininity, even if they are just plastic or fake jewels; older and more senior *hijras* often wore more expensive gold jewellery. At the *sammelan* (inter-regional gathering) I attended, many traders had set up make shift stalls to sell their jewellery, knowing that wealthy *hijras* from several states were in attendance. They had a range of silver and gold jewellery, including very large and heavy items. *Hijras* also wear facial make-up to appear more 'fair'. In the socio-cultural

context, fairness equates to beauty, especially among women. *Hijras* attempted to achieve this effect: Reddy writes that *hijras* would even bleach their faces, not only to hide their facial hair but also to look ‘more like a woman’ (2005: 127-8). Some *kinnars* in MP wore simple make-up, but I did not find it was common practice. In contrast, the *hijras* in Mumbai would wear extensive make-up, accentuating their eyes and lips in particular and covering blemishes. Their make-up kits were extensive and attaining a female appearance was a costly habit. Putting on make-up was part of the ceremony of adopting one’s persona as a *hijra*; as one *hijra* told me with a laugh, no one would recognise her without her make-up.

Another normative feminine characteristic is long hair. Reddy writes that *hijras* are obliged to wear their hair long, as a marker of beauty, and not keeping long hair would result in a fine (younger *hijras* sometimes wore false attachments) (2005: 128).³⁰ The importance of long hair is demonstrated by the punishment given for a serious infraction of rules or for misbehaving: a *hijra*’s hair may be cut as a way of humiliating or publicly stigmatising her from the community (Nanda 1999: 41). I found that certain *kinnars* placed significance on long, lustrous hair, while others did not. Many *kinnars* in MP had short hair, although kept in a feminine style, and it seemed to be individuals’ choice rather than dictated by their community. One *hijra* in Mumbai wore hair extensions regularly, even owning several styles of various lengths. Good quality hair extensions are an investment so they are not an option for all *hijras*. Furthermore, *hijras* place significance of the ‘hairlessness’ of their faces. No *hijras* I met had visible facial hair. Reddy writes that a common practice was the use of *cimṭe* (tweezers) to pluck out facial hair to give a more ‘feminine’ appearance, whereas shaving was seen as masculine and encouraged coarse hair growth (2005: 124-125).³¹ A more modern technique is facial hair removal, or electrolysis, which is believed to enhance the texture of one’s skin and is a permanent hair loss method (Roy 2012: 69).

There are also more extreme methods to produce ‘femininity’ through corporeal modification. Breasts are an important marker of feminine identity. In an attempt to achieve ‘voluptuous female bodies’, *hijras* pad out their bras (Nanda 1999: 17) and even try to encourage bosom growth by taking hormones in large doses (Reddy 2005: 132-3); these oral contraceptives (containing oestrogen and progesterone) can be bought from pharmacies. A more risky method was the injection of hormones, bought illegally from local pharmacies, especially because *hijras* often do not know the side-effects or the risk of sharing needles and lacked medical training (India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2013). Risks are seen as worthwhile in order to gain a more

³⁰ Reddy noted that *hijras* would tell her to grow her short hair out, since it would mark her gender; she noted this irony—that they ‘as men’ wanted long hair while she kept it short—was not lost on them (2005: 129).

³¹ Bradford (1983) notes that *jogappas* in Karnataka used tweezers to remove their beards, called ‘*darśan*’, to remove their beards. According to Reddy, *hijras* use this term (literally a ‘viewing’) both to refer to the beard and the act of plucking (2005: 124-7, 255 n.4).

‘feminine’ body shape.³² In certain circumstances, breast augmentation surgery is an option. A few *hijras* I met in Mumbai had surgery performed in order to create the appearance of breasts (see Roy 2012: 68, 77). They often chose large implants to create a voluptuous shape. Another corporeal symbol of femininity is the vagina. I was not aware of any *kinnars* who had operations to construct vaginas after the *nirvāṇ* operation, although many *hijras* need medical help or surgery to address urological complications (Chakrapani 2004: 13). Reddy reports that several sex-work *hijras* had repeated operations to construct a vagina post-*nirvāṇ*. She notes that this is not equivalent to a transsexual operation since it resulted in the appearance of a vagina only ‘for show’ (*ibid.*: 133).³³ The symbolic value placed on breasts and the appearance of a vagina indicate the importance placed on stereotypically female corporeal aspects in constructing *hijra* gender identity; these practices reinscribe normative female gender attributes (Roy 2012: 51-83).

In addition to adopting bodily and performative practices associated with women, *hijras* perform idiosyncratic gender behaviours, attracting attention to themselves as distinct from men and women and refusing strict categorisation. Reddy writes that this performance signals ‘difference and disruptive potential, both social/symbolic and physical’ (2005: 137). *Hijras* proclaim their status and court ambiguity by using disruptive performative behaviour to identify themselves as distinctly *hijras*: the most visible performances are the use of hand clapping and ‘skirt-raising’.

The ‘hand clap’, or *tālī*, is peculiar to *hijras* and has various meanings. It is loud and distinctive, where the palms strike one another, with fingers outspread and arched backwards. It is used in accompaniment to ritual work, or as an insult to men, hinting at their impotence or their wife’s unfaithfulness. Yasmin Nair writes that the clap is a ‘cultural signifier’ that circulates outside the *hijra* communities to signify doubt about virility or homosexuality (2000: 50-1). The clap draws attention to *hijras* and symbolises the potential of *hijras* to shame the public and strip them of their respect. It is also used by *hijras* with one another to add stress when making a particular point or argument and reinforce their authority. Reddy notes that it is used as a marker of relative respect, to proclaim self-superiority, or to reinforce the authority of one *hijra* over another (2005: 138). It is a clear statement of allegiance to the identity and community: impersonations of *hijras* always include this distinctive clapping (Reddy 2005: 55). Hall notes further that the system of clapping can provide a system of communication among *hijras*. She gives various examples of the *hijra tālī* and their meanings, which include an indication

³² In addition to a desire for breasts, some *hijras* desire ‘working breasts’ which produce milk (Reddy 2005: 133; Nanda 1999: 81).

³³ Several emasculated *hijras* claimed to Reddy to have ‘periodic discharges’ like female menstruation, although they were not blood or semen (2005: 134).

of *badhāt* fares, a way of evaluating non-*hijras*, and various negative indications (1995: 191-2).

A second type of distinct *hijra* gender behaviour is the raising of one's skirt in order to show the physical site of excision. This, according to Nair, 'marks the specificity of the *hijra* and a disruptive region that threatens to wreak havoc on the supposedly normal bodies around it' (2000: 51). *Hijras* are said to perform this action because they have 'no shame' and thus are freed from regular society's restraints. Since *hijras* realise the shame they can provoke in others through exposing their absent genitalia (due to which they have 'no shame'), this powerful act forces public compliance and identifies *hijras* as authentic and powerful. *Hijras* often use this act to shame those who disrespect them, signalling their power over others and implicitly alluding to their potential power to curse and render those viewing impotent. Furthermore, Reddy reads this action as one of reclaiming respect (2005: 139).³⁴ By shaming others, *hijras* force others to meet their demands and respect their power.

Corporeal and performative practices are enacted by *hijras* within the framework of normative masculine and feminine behaviours and bodies. They deny 'maleness' and emulate a female gender identity, alongside performative acts, that are interpreted as neither 'male' nor 'female'.³⁵ *Hijras* construct an idiosyncratic *hijra* identity, confined within a normative binary gender system, and present an identity that can be read as 'part male, part female'. However, *hijras'* gender performance is not simply a reinscription or a subversion of normative gender roles so that their identities can be interpreted as an amalgamation of 'both' male and female or 'neither' male nor female. As Reddy argues, *hijras* 'do not, in any simple way, merely subvert or reinscribe gender difference, but actively and intentionally court ambiguity' (2005: 141), even if this process is unconscious or non-deliberate. *Hijras* realise the constructed nature of their gendered identities, employing different attributes and notions to present a layered and complex identity. Ambiguity is important, even if it is used reactively, or unconsciously. Their gendered discourses and practices allow for multiple gender identities to be performed by different individuals, differentiated by age, class, status, region, and religious considerations, and at different times. The practice of mimicking female attributes and employing idiosyncratic ones signify *hijras'* disruptive potential as ambiguous figures.

³⁴ Many *hijras* desire the *nirvāṇ* operation in order to prove themselves as 'real' *hijras* when disrespected by the public. Despite pain and discomfort, emasculation creates the form of a 'real' *hijra*. Reddy writes it is a 'marker of authenticity', that outweighs its physical costs (2005: 93, 225, 227).

³⁵ A further behaviour seen as explicitly 'not female' is *hijras'* use of vulgarity and sexual insult. See Hall 1995: 139-73.

iii. 'Authentic' Identities

Both the range of identities included in the *koti* spectrum and the performative gender practices enacted by *hijras* reveal the potential and multiple configurations of *hijra* identity. This potential for variety can be developed further through an exploration of the notion of 'authenticity', in the sense of what practices and elements make a more 'real' *hijra* subject. This is a common theme in the discussions above, where notions of authenticity are evident in the process of identifying and categorising *hijras*. *Hijras* claim greater authenticity than other *koti* identities as ascetic, emasculated, socially-structured, sari-wearing individuals. Moreover, *hijras*' mythological and historical legitimation strengthens the authenticity of their particular identity against other 'false' *kotis/pantis*.

Distinctions are made between *hijras* regarding the level of their authenticity and their 'status' within their communities. There are various ways a *hijra* may become 'more authentic', such as performing ritual as opposed to sex work, having the *nirvāṇ* operation, adhering to ascetic discourses, and renouncing one's previous life upon entry to the community. Traditional *badhāt* work is considered as more worthy of 'honour', since *hijras* maintain that traditionally they did not perform sex work, which is perceived as an 'inauthentic' and improper form of work. The vast majority of *hijras* say that they only perform ritual work.³⁶ *Kinnars* in MP did not admit to sex work, although non-*kinnars* say that younger and 'good-looking' *kinnars* were engaged in sex work or had sex with men. It was perceived, including by non-*kinnars*, that sex-work degrades *kinnar* identity. *Gurus* and *nāyaks* particularly deny the practice of sex work, arguing that 'real' *hijras* do not desire men and deny that they themselves engaged in sex work, or sexual relationships with men in the past.³⁷ *Badhāt* work requires harnessing the goddess' power in order to perform blessings, so ideally *hijras* should have undergone the *nirvāṇ* operation to prove their status as 'real' ascetics. Being a 'real', emasculated *hijra* signals status and respect among *hijras* and provides a measure of honour in regard to the outside world, according to the *hijras*. Emasculation is thus a marker of authenticity: Reddy and Nanda both argue that one becomes a 'real' *hijra* irrevocably after the operation (Nanda 1999: 24-6; Reddy 2005). Ideally, in tandem with the *nirvāṇ* operation—legitimised by anatomical deficiency—*hijras* are ascetics, since a lack of desire for men is said to signal 'true' *hijra* identity (Reddy 2005: 83). The rhetoric of asceticism and renunciation not only relates to sexuality but other social ties. An absence of marital relations is expected, along with severing ties to one's natal family.

³⁶ Reddy notes *hijras* would only admit to sex work when pressed on the issue. She argues these occupations seemed to be mutually exclusive and were not practiced simultaneously (2005: 56, 82). Many sex working *hijras* argued that there was a trajectory from sex work to *badhāt* work, once their bodies or desired changed; this history was denied by *badhāt* *hijras* (*ibid.*: 56-7, 82).

³⁷ Reddy confirms that *nāyaks* and *gurus* maintained their asexuality, despite stories from other Hyderabad *zenānas* who 'cruised' with them in their youth (2005: 83).

Although many *hijras* were abandoned, Reddy argues that *hijras* invoked a discourse of renunciation in order to more closely associate with the *sannyāsi* self-image (*ibid.*: 150). In contrast, Adnan Hossain points to evidence regarding *hijras* in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that disputes claims that emasculation and the severing of natal ties are markers of *hijra* authenticity (2012). He writes that many *hijras* in Dhaka perform ‘*hijragiri*’ (collecting alms and performing *badhāt*) away from their heterosexual households where they have wives and children, marking a significant departure from extant narratives where *hijras* sever all ties with non-*hijra* kin (2012: 500). He notes that ‘all men who publicly transgress normative masculine ideals are relegated to the status of *hijra*’, but only those who carry out ‘*hijragiri*’ are considered to be authentic or ‘*sadrālī*’ *hijras* (*ibid.*). Moreover, while many *hijras* invoke the trope that they were ‘born that way’, many *hijras* in Dhaka have a penis and those gifted in the art of concealment are as celebrated as those who have undergone emasculation (*ibid.*: 497). *Hijras* with penises are known as *janana* and those without as *chibry*, but both perform *hijragiri*, Hossain argues, without a distinction as to their authenticity. Hossain writes that ‘it is not on account of emasculation but rather by dint of one’s ability to learn and subsequently conduct *hijragiri* that one becomes, and is publicly recognized as, a *hijra*, regardless of one’s genital status’ (*ibid.*).

Despite the evidence discussed by Hossain, *kinnars* in the context of MP invoked discourses regarding their authenticity, pointing out their status as *kinnars* based on the performance of ritual over sex work, the ‘truth’ of their bodies (as ascetics and regarding dysfunctional sexual ability) and the severance of natal ties, complimenting theorisations by Reddy and Nanda. Discourses of authenticity are significant to *hijras*’ sense of self-worth, in the face of marginalisation and subordination. Such discourses not only construct *hijras* as superior to other *koti* identities but in relation to society at large, such as through ascetic practice.³⁸ Reddy’s discussion of the notion of ‘*izzat*’ (honour) ties in with discussions of authenticity (2005: 15). *Hijras* gain a measure of respect through claims to authenticity and it is this self-assertion that helps to unpack *hijra* identity and suggest how to see *hijras* as *hijras* see themselves.³⁹

³⁸ Arguments regarding authenticity between *kotis* have increased in recent years, especially with tension between ‘real’ and ‘false’ *hijras*. In Bhopal, there has been talk of ‘licensing’ *hijras* in order to distinguish ‘real’ from ‘fake’ following acts of violence, such as after the arrest of eight *hijras* who forcibly emasculated a ‘fake *hijra*’ for stealing their income (Reddy 2005: 246 n.38; cf. Nanda 1999: 11; Niazi 2008).

³⁹ The notion of ‘authenticity’ is useful for other analyses of *hijra* identity, such as participation in politics, in which *hijras* depict themselves as authentic renunciates who can better serve their constituents through their lack of desire for power and money and lack of kinship responsibilities. I develop these arguments later in the thesis.

III. Religious Identifications

Often *hijras* are identified as ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ and these identities are seen as mutually exclusive. Yet, the syncretism of religious roles and practices discussed in scholarship on the *hijras* instead suggests that variation and individuality are important when considering the religious identifications made by *hijras*, based on an individual’s beliefs, background, and spatial, geographical, and historical context, which forms a unique sense of *hijra* religiosity. A framework designating practices as either Hindu or Muslim may be problematic, but the discussion below frames *hijra* religiosity in the terms they use, despite a lack of adherence to an overall tradition.

i. Syncretic Religious Identities?

Hijras ‘religious’ identities may be interpreted as an amalgamation of traditions, through a borrowing of practices and rituals seen as explicitly ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’. This ‘blending’ is often explained by the ‘paradoxical’ nature of Indian religious traditions which can accommodate variant religious practices without ‘compartmentalising’ conflicting beliefs and practices. *Hijras* have managed to negotiate apparently conflicting traditions in order to form an idiosyncratic religious identity for the communities in which they live and individual *hijras* themselves.

The ‘religious and communal syncretism’ among the *hijras* identified and explored by Lawrence Preston is, as he argues, common in village India, probably confused by the British—and perhaps nowadays of a modern—‘predisposition to order’ (1987: 375-6). Preston notes that *hijras* borrow ‘rather freely’ from the cumulative backgrounds of those who joined the community (*ibid.*: 376), adopting particular practices that reflect the need of the specific community based on temporal, spatial, and regional contexts. Pluralistic religiosity is also the product of individuals joining their communities from different religious, caste, and regional backgrounds, such that single households might contain, as seen during my research, both Hindu and Muslim *hijras* (see Nanda 1999: 41) and members from various caste groups (see Reddy 2005: 111; Jaffrey 1997: 104-5). *Hijras*’ religiosity is also a product of their interpretation of their genealogy, as evidenced through my discussion of the construction of *hijra* identity through historical and literary traditions, in which Islamic, Hindu, and Jain traditions are referenced. Their practices suggest an inclusive form of religion among the *hijra* community, precluding a concrete definition. There does not seem to be a conflict between the practices of *hijras*’ religious orthopraxy. Nair writes that this amalgamated identity is due to the fluid and itinerant nature of their identities, which ‘disallows any fixed sense of their practiced faith’ (2000: 115-6, n.1).

Two further conclusions may be considered. First, Nair suggests that *hijras'* congregations and practices can be understood as an 'affirmation of community' rather than of faith (2000: 116 n.1), in which religious practices reveal a *hijra's* affiliation with a specific region, highlight a particular practice significant to that *hijra*, or demonstrate adherence to a practice befitting a *hijra's* social status and function. Their practices construct and affirm the communities to which they belong, whether regional, social, or ritual; moreover, *hijra* religiosity affirms belonging to the identity '*hijra*', by shaping traditional discourses and gaining respect and legitimacy for their identity. Second, as Navtej Purewal and Virinder Kalra suggest, discussing women's popular practices in Indian and Pakistani Punjab, a consideration of women's popular practices might offer a new angle by which to comprehend the social context of cultural and spiritual practices, which, crucially, does not rest on fixed notions of religious belonging or categories (2010: 383). They argue that popular practices are often considered 'informal', such that women's popular practices are interpreted as cultural rather than religious, consigning these practices to the margins and constructing a singular view of religious identity (*ibid.*: 389). Similarly, I would suggest that *hijras'* adoption of aspects of both 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' traditions might offer a lens through which to read the religiosity and social context of marginalised communities, without interpreting these practices as 'informal' or cultural. *Hijras* appropriate various religious symbols from a position of liminality, allowing for heterodox religious practices. While the way in which these practices are interpreted and performed might be unique to *hijra* society, they form a key process through which *hijra* identity is constructed and negotiated, allowing *hijras* to assert their self-consciousness and affirm their identities (see Zene 2000: 70).

ii. *Hindu Rituals*

The first aspect of *hijras'* religiosity associated with Hinduism is worship of the Hindu pantheon, specifically Bahuchara Mata,⁴⁰ the patron-goddess of the *hijras*.⁴¹ *Hijras* perform their ritual role of giving blessings of fertility or prosperity in her name and act as her servants in her temple in Gujarat.⁴² It is through the practice of emasculation that *hijras* believe that they become the vehicle of the goddess' power. The majority of

⁴⁰ I use this name as it is widely used in literature on the goddess. In MP, I also heard her referred to as 'Bochrama'.

⁴¹ Preston writes that the deities worshipped by both Muslim and Hindu *hijras* are always Saivite (1987: 376), but other authors stress *hijras* devotion to the Mata goddess as her devotees and servants, including among 'Muslim' *hijras* (Shah 1961: 63; Hall refers to 'Becrā Mātā': 1995: 248, 294, 366; Reddy 2005: 108; cf. n.18). Reddy calls her 'Bedhraj Mata', a name deriving from the location of her temple at 'Bedhrajpur' in Gujarat.

⁴² One Hindu *kinnar* told me that *kinnars* are the priests of her temple and parents bring their children there for blessings. At the temple, there were *kinnars* present but I did not observe them acting in such a role among the other priests present.

hijras worship Bahuchara as their spiritual guide. Although I found that many *kinnars* did not know any stories or myths associated with the goddess (see Hall 1995: 325), they worshipped her because she affords them protection. Most *kinnars* had a portrait of the Mata in their homes. Shabnam Mausi explained that 'a *kinnar* becomes a *kinnar* because of her blessing...it is believed we should not forget the Mata [since] any bad thing could happen to us. If someone cannot go [to the temple], they should at least keep a photo by their bedside'.

There are several myths that specifically link the *hijras* with Bahuchara Mata. Hall writes that these myths are significant since, to a certain degree, the respect paid to *hijras* is dependent upon that paid to the goddess herself (1995: 114-5). These myths are essential for constructing *hijras*' sense of identity and explaining aspects of their lives, including anatomical form, devotion to the goddess, and their ritual power. The myths that follow were narrated to me in Ahmedabad and Becharaji in Gujarat,⁴³ by *hijras* themselves or by devotees at Bahuchara's temple. A number of these myths are narrated elsewhere (see Nanda 1999, Reddy 2005).

The goddess is associated with male transgenderism and transvestism, including in the myth describing the origin of her worship.⁴⁴ While passing through the forest in Gujarat, thieves attack the maiden Bahuchara's party. Bahuchara cuts off her breasts and, by removing a marker of her 'womanhood', she hopes that the thieves will not rape her. Her act secures her deification for her virtue and purity. In another variation, the thieves are not deterred by her act and do rape her. Bahuchara curses them and the thieves realise she has turned them into *hijras*. In a further version, Bahuchara is a powerful prince. When threatened by thieves, he transforms himself into a woman through his 'spiritual power'. The thieves try to rape her and in her defence she cuts off her breasts so she no longer appears feminine, saying 'I am no longer a woman nor a man'. This act fails to stop them, so she prays to the god Viṣṇu to give her a hiding place. The earth splits open and she jumps inside. She curses the thieves and they become *hijras*.

Bahuchara's ability to transcend her bodily state is reflected by *hijras*' desire to transform their own bodies. Moreover, Bahuchara is said to have transformed through her 'spiritual purity' and *hijras* can gain from the rhetoric of 'spiritual power' to explain

⁴³ Bahuchara is worshipped by a large proportion of the population in Gujarat. Many newlyweds and parents receive blessings for fertility at her only temple, located in the town named after the goddess, Becharaji or Bahucharaji (Mehsana district). There are a variety of myths linking Bahuchara to the site, either for protecting it or ordering her temple to be built here (see Sheikh 2010).

⁴⁴ For alternative myths of Maya and Tara, see Hossain 2012: 504-6. Hossain notes that *hijras* in Bangladesh immediately identified an image of Bahuchara Mata as Maya. Hossain explains that while Bahuchara's origin myths recount the lack or loss of genitalia which reflects *hijras*' own sacrifice of their genitals, in contrast, Maya and Tara were *janana*, who could make their penises disappear with magical claps (506). This mythical status thus corresponds to the real life context of many Bangladeshi *hijras* with penises and indicates how mythological narratives function to explain bodies and behaviour, and reflect individual, regional, and social particularities.

their own transformation, emphasising their spirituality. Another significant aspect of these stories is Bahuchara's creation of *hijras* where *hijra* identity is seen as a 'curse', a price to be paid for harming the goddess. *Hijras* narrate that Bahuchara created the very first *hijra* and the following myth explains their devotion to the goddess.

In one narrative, a prince is forced to marry Bahuchara, but he does not desire a wife and children, since he believes himself to be neither a man nor a woman. The goddess curses him for ruining her life and cuts off his genitals as a punishment, saying that he, and others like him, will require the removal of their genitals in order to be reborn.⁴⁵ The *nirvāṇ* operation is apparently obligatory for those who enter *hijra* communities, although the nature of the operation and the need to be called by the goddess means that many have not had the operation performed. Nanda writes that the practice of 'self-mutilation' (that is, their castration) and 'sexual abstinence by her devotees' is performed in order to secure Bahuchara's favour (1999: 25). Initiates must sacrifice and devote themselves completely to the goddess through the operation.

The goddess' ability to curse men and make them *hijras* demonstrates her control over fertility and sexuality. I noted that there is a link between the respect paid to *hijras* and the respect paid towards Bahuchara Mata (Hall 1995: 114-5). By associating themselves with the goddess and her ability to curse, *hijras* attest to their own 'powers', claiming control over people's fertility by channelling Bahuchara's power.⁴⁶ This claim legitimises *hijras'* *badhāt* work at weddings and birth ceremonies by giving or denying their blessings for fertility. People who receive them into their homes try to keep them happy with the 'price' they pay for such blessings, even meeting what they see as extortionate demands.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Themes of revenge and reverence relating to the goddess coincide with general ideas in 'mother-goddess worship', where the mother-goddess figure expresses notions of power, autonomy, and primacy (see Ganesh 1990). The notion of reverence and submission is illustrated in other myths, for example, the cursing of Arjuna by Urvaśī. See Goldsmith 1993; Doniger 1999; Pattanaik 2002.

⁴⁶ *Hijras'* ability to curse men is linked to the use of verbal insult and obscenity. Hall writes that obscenity is critical to the group's survival (discussing communities who break expectations regarding linguistic purity), as a 'necessary survival technique in a society that enforces their marginalization' (1995: 155). She argues that the *hijras'* curse is comparable to that of the Hindu widow due to their social marginalisation since both unmarried states are a curse. Both widows and *hijras* can defy social convention in regards to language use (*ibid.*; 1997: 442).

⁴⁷ A friend in Sagar (MP) and his wife had a baby during the time I was there. He told me that some weeks after his daughter was born, *hijras* came to his house to give their blessings. He was expected to 'pay' and there was a negotiation over the appropriate amount. He is not wealthy and lives outside the city but nonetheless ended up giving Rs 2500, a sari, and several kilos of rice, stating that it was important to keep the *hijras* happy. In contrast, I attended a *badhāt* ceremony with *hijras* in Mumbai. We were not allowed into the flat (located in a high-rise, luxury tower block): the woman kept the outside gate locked. The *hijras* sat on the floor outside and negotiations began, with the woman approaching the gate and offering slightly more each time. In the end, she refused to give more than Rs 1100, a kilo of rice, and a kilo of sugar. The *hijras* said you could not even buy a nice sari with this money. I was told it was up to the household how much to give, and it was not in this woman's heart to give more. Divided between two *gurus*, the amount was 550 Rs each. Recently in August 2013, Shabnam Mausi was quoted in the *Times of India*, saying that the government should fix the rates of tips for *hijras* on

Two points are significant: the conception of *hijra* identity as a 'curse', as well as the potential for Bahuchara and the *hijras* to have control over fertility. The conception of *hijra* identity as a 'curse' can be seen as derogatory, in the sense that if *hijra* identity is read as a punishment, it might justify their inequitable treatment and explain the fear and prejudice that surrounds the group. Some *hijras* believe this identity 'curse' explains their low social status. Conversely, the ability to curse as a by-product of *hijra* identity can provide relief, where individuals channel the goddess' power to punish those who act improperly towards them with the curse of their own identity.

A factor linked to their unique ritual role and control over fertility is *hijras'* practice of asceticism and renunciation, linked to discourses in Hindu philosophy. *Hijras* invoke an image of themselves as *sannyāsīs*, presenting ideal *hijras* as asexual renunciates (see Reddy 2005: 79; 2003: 175). Sexual and material renunciation possesses important moral force in India, especially relating to 'semen anxiety', where loss of semen implies a loss of vital life energy and masculine strength (Reddy 2003: 175).⁴⁸ Individuals need to learn how to refine and channel their energy, for example, through ascetic practices (Osella and Osella 2006: 137). Divine creative powers stem from the accumulation of 'ascetic heat' or '*tapas*'. Patrick Olivelle notes that this term derives from the Sanskrit root, '*tap*'. '*Tapas*' refers not only to the process of generating heat (asceticism), but to the product of this process, what he terms 'magical heat', which has a creative and sacred quality (1993: 3). Immense generativity is demonstrated in one version of a Hindu creation myth. Śiva is asked to create the world, and retreats into the water for a thousand years to generate his power. In his absence, Brahmā creates the world and when Śiva returns, he breaks off his *lingam*, declaring it to be of no more use. His castrated phallus became the embodiment of creative *tapas*: as Doniger states, '[the *lingam*] becomes a source of universal fertility as soon as it has ceased to be a source of individual fertility' (1973: 135). The notion of creative generativity explains the *hijras'* 'power' in *badhāt* work since the creative power of asceticism is associated with fertility and productivity. In performing this ascetic role, *hijras* link themselves to Śiva and other ascetic individuals, as well as to the Mata. *Hijras* explicitly use these discourses of creative asceticism to legitimise their lives by advocating chastity and emphasising their affinity with mythological asexual figures. While there is evidence to suggest that many *hijras* engage in sex work and or sexual relationships in contemporary India, a discourse of asceticism legitimates their ritual role and is, at least outwardly, emphasised by *hijras*. Walter Penrose notes that asceticism refers to

an economic basis. The article notes that Shabnam explains that fixed rates will save common people from harassment and help their community 'make a decent living' (Singh 2013).

⁴⁸ The practice of renunciation is also the last of the four Hindu life stages (*āśramas*), where each stage of life has appropriate behaviours, including sexual behaviour. The student should be chaste; the householder should engage in sexual relations as a married person to procreate; the third stage sees one gradually withdrawing from the world, preparing for the renunciation of sex in the final stage of the *sannyāsī* (Nanda 1999: 126; see Osella and Osella 2006: 159ff).

abstinence from heterosexual, not homosexual activity in the Hindu tradition; moreover, asceticism in Hindu myths is defined as a lack of procreative sex. He thus concludes that *hijras*' asceticism is 'both complex and ambiguous' (2001: 22).

Theoretically, *hijras* go further than sexual asceticism to 'ensure' corporeal asceticism through emasculation. Although this is the ideal referent for *hijras*,⁴⁹ the practice of ensuring the Mata's blessings⁵⁰ and the life-threatening nature of the operation means that not all *hijras* have had the *nirvāṇ* operation and in many cases the operation cannot or will not be performed for many years.⁵¹ The *nirvāṇ* operation links *hijras* to their mythological creation by the Mata and their devotion to her, as well as to Śiva in his role as creative ascetic. The operation consists of a penectomy and orchiectomy where both penis and testicles are removed (Reddy 2005: 94).⁵² Emasculation is the source of the ritual powers of the *hijras*; Nanda argues: 'it is the source of their uniqueness and the most authentic way of identifying oneself as a *hijra* and of being so identified by the larger society' (1999: 24). However, a definition of *hijra* identity as emasculated fixes *hijra* identity as a corporeal reality, instead of as a conceptual possibility. Moreover, there are corporeal variations among *hijras*, including emasculated individuals; non-emasculated but circumcised individuals; non-emasculated and non-circumcised individuals; impotent men; and naturally born intersexed individuals. However the referent of the *hijra* who has undergone the *nirvāṇ* operation and the operation's symbolic potential as evoking discourses of creative asceticism are important for *hijra* identity within Hindu ritual practices and ideologies.

⁴⁹ I use the term 'ideal referent' to refer to an ideal to which *hijras* aspire and the status that many expect of *hijras*, through there is some disparity between the ideal and actual bodily status or physical practice. *Hijras* are expected to be emasculated as a marker of authenticity, Reddy writes, paradoxically gaining a measure of respect at the same time as 'categorical identification with this label stigmatises them in the eyes of the mainstream public' (Reddy 2005: 57, 95-6). She quotes Margaret Trawick: 'when you are trying to understand a story told in India it becomes important to consider the life of the person telling the story, and when you are trying to understand a person it becomes important to listen to the stories that the person tells' (1990, in Reddy 2005: 90).

⁵⁰ The Mata's blessings are crucial, especially if she did not call you for the operation (Reddy 2005: 108). Shabnam Mausi told me that without Bahuchara Mata's blessing, one cannot become a *hijra*. This conclusion is confirmed by Nanda who notes that *hijras* will only undergo the operation if the goddess is 'ready' to help them and they have signs of her blessing (1999: 27; see 25-6, 33).

⁵¹ For example, Nanda notes that nine of the ten *nirvāṇ* *hijras* she met had it done after many years (five to fifteen). In contrast, she cites Ranade's study (1983) states that four-fifths of the 76 castrated *hijras* interviewed were castrated before the age of fifteen. The proportion of emasculated *hijras* (in relation to overall numbers) is unknown. Hall quotes Mr Bhola, President of 'All India Kalyan Sabha' (a *hijras*' welfare association) in 1986, saying that 98% of *hijras* are castrated, and 2% are hermaphrodites (1995). However, Mr Bhola stated in 2008 that 'I know that most of the eunuchs are fake...neither the government nor the police are doing anything...[so] the number of fake eunuchs is increasing' (Niazi 2008), in response to a 'rise' in 'fake' *hijras* in MP and the threat to 'real' *hijras*' livelihood.

⁵² See Nanda 1999 (Ch. 3) for an account of the significance and ritual of this operation. More recently, sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is performed by doctors in metropolitan cities and the government has been encouraged to draw up more comprehensive national guidelines regarding SRS surgery and its availability for transgender individuals (Indian HIV/AIDS Alliance 2013).

The third aspect of *hijras'* religiosity linked to Hindu traditions are practices that reflect traditional Hindu female practices, including rituals associated with the *nirvāṇ* operation, such as the treatment of *hijras* as post-natal 'mothers' or 'brides'; the practices of mourning 'widows'; and the 'religious' performances undertaken by the *hijras*. In these examples, *hijras* perform recognisable 'feminine' roles. The performance of feminine roles by *hijras'* in enacting their own religiosity serves to indicate the contingent axes of gender and 'religion'.

The *nirvāṇ* operation symbolises the transformation that the initiates undergo in order to become *hijras*. It is not akin to a transsexual operation—transforming a body from 'male' to 'female' in the case of the *hijra*—but for many, the operation is about the transformation into a *hijra* and not a 'woman' (Nanda 1999: 118). The roles performed during the operation mimic feminine roles. The operation takes place at three or four in the morning and is traditionally performed by a skilled *hijra*, known as a *dāt*, literally translated as 'midwife' (as Hall suggests, pointing to the metaphor of castration as birth; 1995: 208).⁵³ Once the emasculation has occurred, the blood must be drained off as it is considered 'male' (Nanda 1999: 28). A forty-day recovery period follows,⁵⁴ similar to that of a woman after childbirth, with similar dietary and ritual practices.⁵⁵ After this period, the *hijra* is dressed as a bride, with her hair parting, hands, and feet decorated with henna (*ibid.*: 29).⁵⁶ After performing *pūjā* to the Mata at a water source, the ritual is complete and a *hijra* is born (*ibid.*: 29).

Another 'female role' performed by *celās* (disciples) is demonstrated at the time of a *guru's* death, where they behave as Hindu widows at the death of a husband. 'Mimicking' Hindu widows, they break their bangles, remove their jewellery, and don a white sari for the period of mourning. Reddy writes that they are permitted to wear coloured clothes only after they have acquired another *guru* (2005: 109, 162; see Jaffrey 1997: 279-81). Hall argues that *hijras* transfer every 'auspicious life-relationship' to their *guru*, in the absence of other worldly relationships (1995: 198). In MP, many of the senior *gurus* who had lost their own *gurus* wore white or light, simple clothes. In part, this was because they did not acquire another *guru*, but I was told it was in respect to their *guru's* passing. The symbolic meanings of these actions—as 'brides', 'recovering

⁵³ One '*dai ma*' *hijra* told Nanda she dreamt the Mata called her to perform operations, despite having no medical training (1999: 27). Having a *hijra* perform the operation has a higher level of ritual (rather than a medical professional) and the risks are high since emasculation is a criminal offense (Section 320 IPC).

⁵⁴ Hossain notes that it is only a twelve-day period following emasculation among *chibry hijras* in Dhaka. See Hossain 2012: 506-7 for a discussion of the ritual surrounding *baraiya*, the completion of this period.

⁵⁵ Nanda writes that similar practices are an 'illustration of the symbolic identification of childbirth with emasculation as rebirth'. She documents the recovery process, including bathing and purifying rituals (1999: 28-9).

⁵⁶ Similarly, Roy describes the rituals at the death of a *hijra*, which includes dressing the deceased as a bride: death signifies the end of a sorrowful life and the new life will bring happiness for the deceased (2012: 215).

mothers' and as 'widows'—can be understood in respect to normative social practices in Indian society.

One further 'female' performance can be seen during religious occasions. Many *hijras* take part in Hindu festivals, often acting a woman's traditional part.⁵⁷ Reddy, in particular, describes the participation of Muslim *hijras* in one of the most popular Hindu festivals in Hyderabad, the '*bonalu panduga*' in 1997 (2005: 109-10).⁵⁸ Women are primarily involved in this festival; they carry elaborate pots to the goddess Mahakali's temple where they are ceremonially broken. Reddy writes that as 'Musalmans', *hijras* are 'officially forbidden to participate' and given a 'stiff fine' if senior *hijras* find out. What is significant about Reddy's account is the presence of a few *badhāi hijras*, the ritual workers, but almost all the *kāndra hijras*, the 'sex-workers'.⁵⁹ A *hijra's* social role—based on type of work and social status more generally—seems to affect the level of participation in differing 'religious' activities, revealing intersections between ritual role, social status, and religiosity. The *kāndra hijras'* role in the festival is differentiated from the *badhāi hijras'* role according to status and occupation, and this distinction is tied up with notions of authenticity, perhaps allowing the 'less authentic' *hijras* the possibility of participating in such festivals without recrimination from or justification to the more hierarchical households. Occupation and notions of authenticity are one explanation for the participation of 'Muslim' *hijras* in Hindu festivals. When questioning why and how individuals incorporate 'Hindu' elements into general religious practice—and to varying degrees—Reddy discusses the factor of region, or geographical context. The *bonalu panduga* is a popular Hyderabad festival, 'perhaps highlighting *hijras'* affiliation with place rather than religion in particular contexts' (*ibid.*: 110). Thus, individual regional context is a further factor in considering *hijras'* religiosity.

iii. Muslim Practices

Hijras also perform specific practices seen as explicitly 'Muslim': *hijras'* naming practices, daily 'Muslim' rituals, and the importance of shrines and festivals can be seen as part of the orthopraxy of Islamic doctrine. Practices here labelled or categorised as 'Muslim' might instead be the result of the adoption of localised Sufi practices or those which have historical roots in Mughal court cultures (in which *hijras* enjoyed comparative privilege). Such practices therefore have significance within *hijras'*

⁵⁷ Shah mentions *hijras* going on 'begging tours' during festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Navaratri (1961: 1327).

⁵⁸ The *hijras* Reddy interviewed were self-identified 'Muslims' (2005: 114-117).

⁵⁹ These are the Hyderabad terms used to define a difference in roles: usually *kāndra hijras* become *badhāi hijras*, but both roles are 'ideologically exclusive domains of practice' (Reddy 2005: 81).

religious practice, pointing to the necessity of adopting syncretic practices for a group who hold a position of (religious) liminality. As mentioned above, a 'blurring' of 'religious' practices might in fact reveal more about the social context of *hijras'* cultural and spiritual practices, as well as the historical; the term 'Muslim' here should therefore provoke a consideration of why *hijras* use such practices, rather than an interpretation of such practices as distinctly 'Muslim'. Moreover, the incorporation of apparently mutually exclusive elements into *hijras'* lived realities, as seen through the adoption of both 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' rituals and practices, should not be seen as paradoxical or problematic but instead reveal the complexity of religiosity among *hijras*.

One notable practice is the adoption of Muslim names. Reddy states that upon joining the *hijra* community, initiates or their *gurus* choose a new name for the initiate, often Hindu and female. In addition, they are given male Muslim names, which are 'the official names entered in the *hijra* register maintained by the *nāyaks*' (2005: 103). In Hyderabad, while many *hijras* preferred their Hindu names, all of the *nāyaks* were addressed by their Muslim names, whatever their prior religious affiliation, perhaps to denote their superior position. Reddy's account may be limited by the contextual nature of Hyderabad as a historically important Muslim location, accounting for the more common self-assertion of the Hyderabad *hijras* as Muslims. However other accounts also mention *hijras* with Muslim names, such as Nanda's account of Salima, a Muslim-born hermaphrodite, who was given this name by her *guru* at her initiation (1999: 102). Preston discusses the differences in naming practices in varying colonial documents. In different subdistricts of Pune, it was reported that one group of (both Hindu and Muslim) *hijras* had 'rather fanciful, vaguely Hindu names', yet at the same time, another group of *hijras* from the Indapur district, from varying castes, upon emasculation took 'the names of Musselmanee women, and as such, live and are buried' (1987: 376). In a further variation, Shah reports that in central Gujarat, the adoption of a woman's name is commonplace along with the suffix '*kumvar*' (prince), which usually signifies a man's name (1961: 1326). In MP, *kinnars* tended to have singular Hindu names, both male and female, often coupled with kinship terms, despite explicit identification as Muslim, rather than Hindu. In contrast, the only *kinnar* I met who identified as Hindu had a Muslim name. This *kinnar*, Shabnam, came from a Brahmin family and retained the religion into which she had been born. The other *kinnars* self-identified as Muslim, but preferred their Hindu names, even when they had Muslim names as well. One *nāyak* in the community had a male name, Gopal, and wore male clothes. His senior status might be reflected in the use of this male name, which would confirm Reddy's statement that *nāyaks* were addressed by their 'official' male names. Hall notes that *hijras* in Banaras said that *hijras* are named in such a way that no other person in the area will have the same name, in order to minimise confusion, but there was no particular meaning behind the names adopted by initiates

(1995: 268, 361). The inconsistency of naming practices at the very least indicates that *hijras* adopt new names upon their initiation, which are sometimes Muslim. The adoption of both Hindu and Muslim elements in naming practices may further allude to the syncretic nature of *hijra* social practices.

Important 'Muslim' practices include *hijras*' daily customs, such as circumcision, *namāz* (daily prayers), burial customs, and clothing. While the majority of *kinnars* in MP identified as Muslim, I was not able to find out about circumcision or burial customs: the first due to the personal nature of the question and the second due to the *hijras*' secrecy. Reddy writes that circumcision was compulsory for initiates, as a quintessential marker of Muslim (male) identity (2005: 103). Reddy explains that in Hyderabad, *hijras* were predominately seen as Muslim because of the practice of circumcision. It is also a common practice of saying *namāz*. Though many *hijras* did not visit mosques—due to their social marginalization from sites of religious practice⁶⁰—many pray in their houses and have special rooms for these purposes. In the houses of *hijras* explicitly identifying as Muslim, I was shown pictures or printed material depicting mosques and Qur'anic verses (see Reddy 2005: 103-4; Jaffrey 1997: 155, 163). One *kinnar* had a specific room that served as a prayer room.

The rituals performed at the death of a *hijra* are also arguably Muslim but there is variation in accounts. As noted above, the *celās* of a *guru* act in the manner of Hindu widows upon the *guru's* death, but there are various opinions regarding burial practices. Reddy notes that the rituals performed for the deceased replicate those performed at the death of a Muslim man, including the washing of the corpse, the 'viewing', prayers from the Qur'an, and a burial in the Muslim cemetery with the body carried by non-*hijra* men⁶¹ and placed on a north-south axis with the head turned towards Mecca (2005: 107). On the fortieth day after the burial, *hijras* from all over the country gather to pay their respects and are fed and housed by the deceased's house (see Sharma 1989: 121).⁶² Zia Jaffrey writes that burial rituals were carried out in the middle of the night, including the burial itself (1997: 78-9). I was told, albeit from non-*hijras*, that *hijras* are buried 'like Muslims', and not cremated in accordance with Hindu tradition. One *kinnar* spoke to me about death rituals in an indirect manner, saying she would be cremated since she had been born a Hindu, suggesting that *hijras*' last rites

⁶⁰ While not specifically a site of religious practice, Hossain highlights the acceptance of *hijra* identifications and transvestism in Dhaka by devout Muslims (2012: 501).

⁶¹ One *hijra* told Hall that they do not go to cremation grounds (and presumably burial grounds) in the same way women do not go, so deceased *hijras* are taken by their neighbours, which is why people often do not know when *hijras* have died (1995: 315). The fact that neighbours will take the body suggests a closer relationship between *hijras* and their neighbours than might be expected, which is supported by narratives throughout Hall's thesis in which *hijras* relate that they are not seen as outsiders in Indian society (*ibid.*: 286, 340-1).

⁶² Reddy gives an elaborate account of burial customs, as related to her by one *celā* and a Muslim neighbour, Abbas, although she did not witness the rituals. Abbas said that *hijras* are buried like any other Muslim man in the neighbourhood, except *hijras* invite 'their people' for the ceremony (2005: 107-8).

might be dependent upon the religion individual *hijras* follow (see Hall 1995: 314-5). In contrast, a self-identified Muslim *kinnar* told me that *kinnars* must be converted to become a Muslim or Christian, because burial is what ensures *mukti* (salvation). Non-*hijras* speculated that *hijras* are buried in other people's graves, in the middle of the night, because they have nowhere allocated in which to bury their dead. I was also told that *hijras* are buried standing straight up, such as in the floor of houses. *Shabnam Mausi* (a film made about her victory as a state politician) portrayed the burial of a *guru*, who was wrapped in a shroud and buried standing straight up in the floor of a house. This representation might have added to the belief that this is how *hijras* bury their dead. However, no *hijras* indicated that any of these methods were common practices. In contrast to all these accounts, Roy witnessed the death and cremation of one *hijra guru* in Mumbai during her fieldwork. She writes that since this *guru* had converted to Islam, the last rites would be observed following Islamic rituals (2012: 214-5). The *hijra* had expressed the wish that vermilion be applied to her forehead, the Hindu symbol for a married female, by her man, and this was done, after she was dressed as a bride and beautified with ornaments and make-up. Roy writes that *hijras* believe their death signifies the end of a sorrowful life and the deceased with have a new life will be full of happiness (*ibid.*: 215). The priest told her that the last rites for cremation would consider this *hijra* as a man: since *hijras* were born biologically male, they would be cremated as males. The *guru* was cremated at the nearest burial ground (216).

A further explicit marker is keeping *halāl* in dietary practices. I found that different households cater according to the beliefs of their members and might prepare different meals for different individuals, but they will eat together, in contrast to colonial accounts used by Preston that note that *hijras* of different religions do not interdine (1987: 376). Reddy states that *halāl* meat is imperative if they eat meat, sacrificed by one of the Muslim (by birth) *hijras* of the group, if not by a Muslim butcher (2005: 106) and this was the case in MP.

Sartorial practices are also noted by Reddy as a significant Muslim practice. She notes the adoption of the *burqā* (black robe and veil as worn by Muslim women in public) over *hijras'* saris, especially when going out alone or with men with whom they were involved, but not when going out for work in order to attract more attention (*ibid.*: 104). She notes that, especially among the *hijras* she interviewed from a particular lineage, on certain 'religious' occasions, *hijras* had to wear green saris, the colour associated with Islam (*ibid.*). Though the majority of *kinnars* in MP identified as Muslim, I observed none wearing a *burqā*. Some would veil their heads when out in public, as a marker of modesty. Many would wear *bindīs* on their forehead; a practice that Nanda observed in her fieldwork site in South India (1999: 17), but this practice is in contrast to Hyderabad where *hijras*, like other Muslim women, were not 'officially' allowed to wear *bindīs* (2005: 101).

A significant Muslim practice is worship at shrines and participation in Muslim festivals. The most important pilgrimage undertaken by *hijras* which was a source of immense pride is going on the Hajj, the holy pilgrimage to Karbala or Mecca and Medina, increasing their status among *hijras* and wider society. In MP, *hijras* who had gone proudly added the suffix ‘*Hajji*’ after their name, including Kamla Bua and Heera Bai. Hossain writes that *hijras* perform the pilgrimage as men, regardless of whether they have been emasculated. When asked why it is performed as men, one *hajji hijra* told him: ‘you can lie to the whole world, but not Allah’ (2012: 502). Many *hijras* took part in explicitly Muslim religious events as one of the only occasions when *hijras* all over the country got together.⁶³ These events take place at sites of religious significance, such as Muslim *dargāhs* (mausoleums) across the country, including the tomb of a twelfth-century Sufi saint (Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, popularly known as Garib Nawaz), whose tomb is located in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Jaffrey describes how *hijras* from all over the country visit this tomb, to pay homage and to resolve household disputes (1997: 103-4). This shrine was important to *kinnars* in MP and one *kinnar* narrated a story in which a *kinnar* prayed everyday to this saint, asking for a son. She became pregnant, but was unable to give birth, so she took a knife and slit open her belly. Both the *kinnar* and her son died.⁶⁴ The story demonstrates that *kinnars* worship this saint and offer special prayers to the dead *kinnar* and her child (Roy 2012: 34). Gathering at shrines also serves an important social and communal function, where *hijras* all over the country can come together.

In the context of MP, *hijras* identify as either Hindu or Muslim in MP: they self-identify as a practitioner of a tradition, but identification does not necessitate strict adherence to such practices or to the whole tradition itself. In fact, identification with a specific tradition creates a false distinction, based in part on colonial categorisations of *hijras*’ religion. Academic writing before the 1980s identified *hijras* as either Hindu or Muslim, perceiving *hijra* religiosity as part of a wider religious tradition. I discussed earlier how *hijras* were mentioned as a distinct caste or community in caste glossaries, divided occasionally into male and female, as well as Muhammadan and Hindu *hijras* (Crooke 1896: 495). The binary framework thus indicates how *hijra* identity was classified even though there might be a ‘false’ distinction in the separation of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’. Nonetheless, *hijras* borrow and adopt a variety of religious practices identified as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ and I have discussed practices and beliefs that might be identified as belonging to a singular tradition. At the same time, acknowledging the constructed nature of the categories for religious practice among *hijras* provides a framework to interpret practices and rituals that might be otherwise

⁶³ For literature on communal events, see Sharma 1989: 120-1; Jaffrey 1997: 103; Reddy 2005: 108.

⁶⁴ Hossain tells the same story relating to Mariom, a *janana hijra* (2012: 508). See Hall 1995: 49.

paradoxical or problematic when *hijras* are seen as borrowing ‘freely’ from different communities and traditions.

IV. Hijra Society

I now turn to discuss the social spaces in which *hijras* live and work. Alongside *hijras*’ ritual work, *hijras* engage in other forms of work in contemporary India, such as begging, extortion, and sex work. These forms of work affect how the mainstream public perceive the *hijras* and their role in society. *Hijras* maintain their own households and communities, creating social spaces that offer support and security, as well as providing the potential for relationships of love and support among and between different *hijra* groups. These relationships are crucial for understanding spaces in which *hijra* groups live and thrive and how they construct a sense of group identity.

i. Social Roles

Hijras perform two main roles in modern society: *badhāt* (ritual) work and sex work. *Hijras* also demand dues from territory over which their household has control; Hossain counts alms collection and *badhāt* work as *hijragiri* (2012). ‘Formal’ work and sex work are seen as mutually exclusive. Reddy writes that they are not practiced simultaneously (2005: 56, 81), but this seems to be how *hijras* represent the situation, rather than the reality of daily practice. It is important for *hijras* (particularly *badhāt hijras*) to stress their asexuality to legitimate their ability to give blessings. There is a hierarchy in the community according to the work performed by different members, where sex work is perceived as lower than ritual work.

I met several *hijras* in Mumbai who engaged in sex work, and on occasion I saw them giving money to their *guru* which they had received from this work, but it was not clear whether they also practiced ritual forms of work. *Kinnars* in MP were more adamant regarding the performance of traditional work, denying sex work and stressing the purity of their bodies and practices. While no *kinnars* admitted to sex work, there is a sexual component to their identities and there is an assumption that they have sex with non-*kinnars*. I observed that when younger *kinnars* were walking on the streets, they were seen as dressing ‘provocatively’—by both older members of the *kinnar* community and society at large—and attracted male attention. ‘Provocative’ dress included low-cut or tight *śalvār qamīz*, which often outlined the shape of their bodies, particularly their breasts, or ‘western’ style clothes such as tight jeans and shirts such as halter-neck tops or tops with thin straps, revealing their shoulders and breasts

(see Roy 2012: 59), or short dresses and heels that accentuated their legs. Discussions about *kinnars* with non-*kinnar* men in mainstream society alluded or referred to prostitution or sexual practices, so there does appear to be a conflation of *hijra* identity and sexual practice in mainstream social imagination.

Hijras draw upon discourses that explain their power to confer blessings and allude to their potentially destructive ability to curse those who disrespect them. Traditionally, *hijras*' function in society was ritualistic and associated with blessings of fertility, performing at weddings or birth ceremonies (Nanda 1999: 4-6). While the practice still occurs, the demand for ritual services has decreased as individuals place less importance on ritual practices, especially in modern, cosmopolitan cities. A lack of demand, in turn, decreases the importance given to *badhāt* work.⁶⁵ As families move towards contemporary ideas of the nuclear family and a more 'secular' society, there is a desire for fewer children and a move away from belief in ritual practice to modern practices such as medical technology, which negates the need for blessings associated with fertility. *Hijras* power over impotency is dismissed as 'mere superstition', alongside public anger over *hijras*' use of fear to collect money (Hall 1997: 439).

The decrease in demand for traditional work has forced some *hijras* to turn to 'non-traditional' work, which includes sex work, and other forms of begging and extorting money from within their households' 'territories'. An interpretation of sex work as being a modern phenomenon does not mean that it did not exist before modern times:⁶⁶ presumably prostitution and *hijra* sexual practices did exist but they may have been the result of the gratification of individual desires, rather than as a practice tied to the socio-economic survival of the community (Nair 2000: 116, n.2; Reddy 2005: 83). Sex work is a means by which *hijras* can provide for their communities. A third means of surviving economically is through begging or 'extorting' money. *Hijra* society is divided up such that territory belongs to different households from which they collect 'dues' or 'alms'. By claiming this right to economic support—in turn offering a means of 'protection'—*hijras* secure a means of income, although this is unstable and unreliable.⁶⁷

Adopting 'non-traditional' work has led to the further marginalisation of *hijras* even though such practices are necessary given a lack of opportunities elsewhere. Sex work 'degrades' *hijras*' ideal ascetic status, whilst begging or extortion ensures that

⁶⁵ A lessening in demand is demonstrated by tensions that arise between different groups who demand their right to control territories and protect future earnings. Territorial and aggressive acts are on the rise against those who steal *hijras*' rightful earnings, such as tensions between *hijras* and the '*berūpias*' in Hyderabad (Reddy 2005: 72-3) and 'real' and 'fake' *kinnars* in MP (Niazi 2008).

⁶⁶ Although senior *hijras* argue that sex work is a modern phenomenon, Preston discusses colonial sources regarding *hijras*' sexual practices (1987: 377).

⁶⁷ This can also be lucrative depending on the area controlled by the household. In one large city in MP, one non-*kinnar* close to the community speculated that the *nāyak* could collect up to Rs 30,000 in a single day.

society see the community as greedy or beggars. One of *hijras*' major concerns is the lack of work for them in a society that still—in many rural locations—structures different forms of work on the hierarchy of caste and denies equality of opportunity, whether based on caste or gender status. *Hijras* have two options: perform *badhā* and retain a degree of respect but make very little money⁶⁸ or practice prostitution and begging but degrade their theoretically ascetic status. Bourdieu's theorisations of social capital, one form of which is economic capital, could be considered here, providing a framework for considering *hijras* forms of work in different fields (here, ritual or sexual). The accumulation of capital is necessary for survival, including economic capital, which is directly convertible into money (1989). Lack of work options elsewhere force the *hijras* to perform work for which they can receive payment, which is only possible within these fields, but, which in turn, impacts the status they hold in relation to mainstream social actors. The necessity of performing sex work has led to problems with the integration of *hijras* into society, reflected in the way *hijras* are regarded and recorded in the public press or contemporary literature, which indicates an 'intolerance of difference' (Hall 1995: 31-4, Menen 2007) and a perceived need to regulate *hijras* and their working practices (Niazi 2008). These two types of work reveal *hijras*' awkward place in society, trapped between ritual status and marginalised sexual practice.

ii. *Retheorising Kinship*

Trawick notes that 'any person trying to understand South Asian culture must eventually examine and comprehend [its] elegant patterns of kinship organisation' (1990: 118). Exploring *hijras*' strong sense of communal identity and the kinship relations developed among and between communities aids an understanding of their identity based on society, organisation, and relationships. *Hijra* relationships—*guru-celā*, familial, and *hijra*-husband—can be seen to mirror heteronormative kinship arrangements (see Bockrath 2003: 95), but instead of viewing these relationships as derivative, the negotiation of normative social practices might offer an understanding of alternative forms and meanings of kinship (Reddy 2005: 164; see Weston 1991).⁶⁹ The variety and complexity of *hijra* relationships might 'trouble' ideas of normative kinship,

⁶⁸ Any money made is divided among the individuals performing: in worst case scenarios, *celās* give all their money to their *gurus*, and in return—although they are given food and housing—may not receive any earnings (see Reddy 2005: 158).

⁶⁹ For scholarship that discusses kinship networks, see Shah 1961, Sinha 1967, Sharma 1989, Nanda 1999, Jaffrey 1996, Reddy 2005. Moreover, Kath Weston's work on the impermanence of natal kinship relations and the permanence of 'the families we choose' demonstrates a reversal of dominant heterosexual discourses on kinship (1991). I explore her theorisations in relation to the construction and meaning of relatedness and kinship among *kinnar* groups, focusing on living spaces and relationships between *kinnars*, including the place of children in communities, in a forthcoming article (Ung Loh, forthcoming).

based on heterosexuality, marriage, procreation, and genetic continuity. Although scholars have discussed *hijra* kinship relations, there is little discussion of the complexity of these relationships and their meaning. Often they are interpreted as mimicking heteronormative relations in Indian society, but marriage and consanguinity are not central to these relations. Relations are chosen and maintained by *hijras*, where 'chosen bonds' are presented as more important than biology and are seen to be 'most reliable' (Reddy 2005: 151). Reddy demonstrates that *hijras* and *kotis* are presented as family whereas husbands and partners are not (*ibid.*: 52, 169).

The primary relationship among community members is between *gurus* and *celās*. These are obligatory, hierarchical, and mutually-beneficial relationships, based on a framework of duties and responsibilities: a 'relationship of sacrifice' is how it was described by one *kinnar*. In order to become affiliated with a specific *hijra* house, an initiate must swear loyalty to a *guru*, usually a well-established member of a house. Affiliation to a house and the *guru* are key to a *hijra's* identity, as Hossain argues: 'it is by the name of the *guru* or the symbolic house that s/he represents that a *hijra* will be known throughout her/is life-historical trajectory in the community' (2012: 501). Hall writes that the *guru* accepts the initiate as a daughter-in-law (1995: 195) and that rituals performed correspond to those of a newly married Hindu bride entering her father-in-law's house, including the subversion of terms traditionally associated with sanctioned kinship (*ibid.*: 201).⁷⁰

When initiates join the community, an economic transaction cements the connection between initiates and their *gurus*. Reddy notes that at initiation, *celās* pay their *gurus* a fixed sum which increases by twofold every time they change their *guru* or house (2005: 157). In contrast, Nanda records that it is the *guru* who pays a sum to the *nāyaks* of the household on behalf of the initiate, binding the *celā* to her for bringing her into the community (1999: 44). Switching houses and *gurus* is not uncommon, *kinnars* told me, but if a *kinnar* joins a new household and a new *guru*, the old *guru* will demand a sum of money from the new one which covers both the loss of earnings that the old *guru* will incur by losing that *celā* and whatever the *celā* takes to her new house in terms of money and jewellery. Nonetheless, all these transactions bind the *celā* to her *guru*, resulting in the relationship, in part, being maintained through obligation rather than choice.

The relationship between *guru* and *celā* is preserved through the reliance of *celās* upon their *gurus*, especially *badhā* *hijras*. Initiates must learn the ritual performances from senior community members and it is the *guru's* choice who performs, often based on their 'talents' or the *guru's* favour (Reddy 2005: 158). Those with whom the *guru* is displeased are less likely to succeed in terms of upward mobility, or benefit, regarding

⁷⁰ The notion of the *hijra* as bride mirrors the treatment of the *nirvāṇ* *hijra* after the operation when she is dressed as a bride (Nanda 1999) and Roy's description of the deceased *guru* dressed as a bride for her funeral (2012).

chores assigned, free time given, and discretionary ‘presents’ (money, jewellery, clothing). Any money that the *celās* receive is shared, in whole or in part, with their *gurus*. In return, *celās* are given a place to live, food, belongings or gifts, and social security. They perform household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, and help to look after the *guru*. Despite hardship or indignities suffered at the hands of *gurus*, many *hijras* prefer to stay with them and receive a level of social support.⁷¹ In addition, each household controls a specific territory and non-affiliated *hijras* often suffer from a lack of economic opportunities if they are not part of the wider community of *hijras*.

One of the *guru*’s chief responsibilities is overseeing the *nirvāṇ* operation, including the cost, helping the *celā* recover, and hosting the celebration. The *celā*’s loyalty to her *guru* is ensured and is a significant ‘investment’ for both the *guru* in terms of economic return and in regard to the social reproduction of *hijra* communities. The *guru-celā* relationship is the foremost bond in *hijra* kin relations since it is through a *guru* that a *hijra* establishes her lineage and is acknowledged as a member of a *hijra* household and house. In turn, *celās* become *gurus*, extending the *hijra* network.

There are two other kinds of kin relations: familial ones akin to relationships between mothers, sisters, and daughters, and companionate ones among *hijras* and their partners. Both forms replace emotional relations that are lost upon separation from natal families: Reddy terms them ‘bonds of love’ (2005, 2006). One *kinnar* described these relations as those which give them strength to live, signifying the importance of relations of love and affection between *kinnars*, which are crucial given their lack of natal family and kinship ties.

Since the majority of *hijras* identify as female, relationships are often referred to as those between mothers and daughters or between sisters. Terminology used parallels those used more generally in society, mirroring heteronormative social relationships. For example, ‘*bahin*’ is used between individuals who share a sisterly relationship, or ‘*dīdī*’, if referring to an ‘elder’ sister (‘elder’ may refer to age and seniority). Many elder *gurus*, particularly in MP, added suffixes to their names, such as ‘*būā*’ (paternal aunt) or ‘*maustī*’ (maternal aunt). Furthermore, relations between a mother and daughter are extended; for example, a mother’s mother would be referred to as ‘*dādī*’ (paternal grandmother) or *nānī* (maternal grandmother). In Banaras, Hall notes that *hijras* addressed one another as *mā* (mother), *beṭī* (child), *dīdī* (sister) (1995: 44, 325, 363). Reddy notes that in Hyderabad, terms for relations often have the prefix ‘*dudh*’, such as *dudh beṭī*, ‘milk daughter’, referencing the nurturing bond between mothers and their children through a mother’s milk (2005).

⁷¹ Some *hijras* refuse strict social rules and prefer to live outside established households (although they belong to *hijra* lineages), where they can retain their independence in regards to finances, sexual desires, and where they live. Reddy notes this lifestyle is seen as having lower honour (2005: 161). Other accounts indicate that *hijras* have to accept this social insecurity due to other reasons, such as falling out with their *gurus*, or misbehaviour. See Nanda 1999; Opler 1960, 1961; Carstairs 1957.

Relationships between ‘mother’, ‘sisters’, and ‘daughters’ do not follow *guru-celā* relationships: a *guru* would not become her *celā*’s mother. However, two *gurus* might form a sisterly bond, so each one’s *celās* are seen as nieces, or one *hijra* might form a mother-daughter relationship with the other’s *celās*. Relations are maintained even after death. For example, when a sister dies, the living sister remains an aunty to the deceased’s daughters. Relationships are formalised publicly at *sammelans* through specific ceremonies. One of the functions of the *sammelan* is to announce and formalise new relations—both *guru-celā* and familial—in front of those present. When a new relation is formalised, it is recorded and each *sammelan* will keep a list of the relations formed at that meeting. I was told that relations last as long as those involved wish to remain relations. However, relations must be broken publicly at another *sammelan*, by stating that the participants intend to break the relation. There may be a monetary penalty involved in dissolving relations. The ceremonies at the Sagar *sammelan* I attended took place in an extremely large hall in the *nāyak*’s house. The room was filled with hundreds of *kinnars* who were watching the proceedings, including many who were sitting around the edges of the balconies that overlooked the hall. Kinship ceremonies involved discussion by the *nāyaks*, who sat in the centre of the room in a loose circle, and gift giving between those who were establishing their relations.

Relationships between mothers and daughters are enacted through a particular ritual, which is the *dūdh* ceremony described by Reddy (2005: 165). The *dūdh mā* (‘milk mother’, literally ‘foster mother’) holds her ‘daughters’ in her lap. These *hijras* become her daughters—and one another’s sisters (‘*dūdh bahin*’, literally a ‘foster sister’)—through drinking their ‘mother’s’ milk, poured from a cup held at her breast, to seal their relationship with her.⁷² In MP the ceremony is called ‘*bhāt bharai*’,⁷³ where mother and daughter offer one another uncooked rice, fruit, and money. The term ‘*bhāt*’ also refers to a marriage ceremony where the groom’s father is offered rice by the bride’s family and presents are given to the bride: the exchange of gifts by mother and daughter replicates this ceremony. The milk pouring ceremony cements their bond and a social fee is levied.

Another significant form of relationship is developed between *hijras* and children in the community. Research that examines the role of children in the *kinnar* community is practically non-existent. These relations allow *hijras* to experience a parental-child relationship that they might not otherwise experience. Two types of children join the community: those abandoned by poor and often lower-caste families

⁷² Sinha refers to the ‘*doodh-bhaat*’ (‘rice and milk’) as an initiation rite which the initiate (*jankha*) must undergo to become a full *hijra* (1967: 173), although it is unclear whether the ‘mother-master’ is a *guru* or a mother figure or both. In contrast, Shah writes that a *guru* is regarded as ‘mother’ and the initiate is the ‘daughter’, collapsing the distinction between *guru-celā* and mother-daughter relationships (1961: 1328). Thus, according to this ‘fictional kinship’, all *hijras* have sisters, aunts, and cousins.

⁷³ A journalist who witnessed the ritual translated this as the ‘rice’ ceremony, where *bhāt* means ‘cooked rice’ and *bhranā* means to ‘fill’.

and *hijra* children. Abandoned children are adopted as members of their communities but are usually married off and leave the community. In contrast, '*hijra* children' will remain with the community throughout their lives. There are a host of speculative stories regarding the kidnapping and forced emasculation of youths, or even adults, to recruit members. It is complex to ascertain exactly how children join *hijra* communities. It is a common belief in India that *kinnars* have the 'right' to claim a child who is born as a *hijra*, usually due to intersex or ambiguous sexual organs. *Hijras* 'find' these children in various ways:⁷⁴ at a birth ceremony when the child is found to be a *hijra*, or where word is passed on from those who work at hospitals, or even when the child is older and people begin to suspect that the child is a *hijra*. The 'right' to claim *hijra* children is commonly believed although it is in direct contradiction to *hijras*' own accounts. *Kinnars* claim that parents themselves give up the child to avoid the shame of raising a *kinnar* child. The parents know that the *kinnars* will raise and treat the child as their own. One *kinnar* noted that usually upper caste and well-off families give up *kinnar* children because of a sense of shame, whereas lower-caste families, especially in rural areas, will keep the child.⁷⁵

I met a variety of *hijra* children who are well-loved and cherished members of the *hijra* community. One *kinnar* in MP had many children whom she sent to various *celās* who took it in turn to care for them. Moreover, many of the abandoned children who were adopted by individual *kinnars* had strong bonds with the households in which they had been raised, spending time in the household despite being married and living elsewhere. It was stressed that the children brought into the community—*kinnar* or otherwise—should get an education and be raised with good morals and values. Education is an important issue, since many *kinnars* tend to be illiterate, having been forced to drop out of school. Recently, an additional sessions court in Surat, Gujarat, granted legal custody of three children to a *hijra*, Govind, when his brother and wife passed away (*Indian Express* 2013). The wife's sister submitted an affidavit stating that Govind had no financial problems and was better able to take care of the children than she was, including keeping them at their private school, and the children had expressed a wish to stay with their uncle.

A further kinship relation is that between *hijras* and their 'husbands'. Although sexual practice is explicitly renounced when espousing the rhetoric of asceticism, many

⁷⁴ One *hijra* told Hall that once a week they go to the municipal office and get a list of the names of all the children born, in exchange for a fixed sum of money (1995: 339). Thus they come to know of each birth and can perform *badhāi* work.

⁷⁵ One *guru* spoke to me about a lower-caste couple who had three '*kinnar* children' in succession, whom they raised as daughters but were forced eventually to give them to the local *kinnar* household, where the *guru's celā* adopted them. The *celā* adopted another young child, who was described as having 'marks' (*cihne*) of both sexes. Secondary sexual organs deemed to be 'abnormal', in the sense that the organs do not look as they 'should', is all that is required to label a child a *kinnar*. Some of these children will develop into women.

hijras do have sex, either fulfilling an individual desire or performing sex work.⁷⁶ Scholars have discussed the relationships between *hijras* and their partners, often focusing on the sexual aspects, but it is evident that *hijras* desire companionate relations with men based on love, affection, and support. Narratives from both Reddy (2005, 2006) and Nanda (1999) indicate that these relationships are more than sexual and marriages are often idealised and romanticised and seen as long-term commitments, based on the love or affection between partners (Reddy 2006: 178). Many *hijras* desire companionship outside of their community and on rare occasions live outside the community with their husbands (Nanda 1999: 39, 104). However, *pantis* are portrayed as definitively ‘not family’ (Reddy 2005: 169) and are unlikely to provide for their ‘wives’ in the long term (*ibid.*: 169, 171). Many *pantis* have other wives and children; some of these relationships are acknowledged and ‘amicable’, whereas others are a source of trouble (2005: 170).⁷⁷ Many *hijras* suffer both emotional and physical abuse although this is considered a price worth paying for ‘love-relationships’. Reddy writes that a longing for ‘bonds of affection and emotional intimacy’ is what motivates the quest for ideal husbands and companionship (2006: 190) and a consideration of these forms of relationships and the negotiation of discourses of marriage, kinship, and love are significant to an understanding of the *hijra* subject on an individual and emotional level.

The *hijra* community has found alternative ways in which to develop relationships of love, between *hijras* and one another, their children, and their partners. These forms of kinship reveal affection and love between *hijras*, as one might share with natal family and kin, although these relations are not based on heterosexuality, marriage, or consanguinity. Communal bonds are significant for a group of marginalised individuals and the use of female kinship terms evokes relations of companionship. These relations establish and extend kin relations throughout *hijra* communities, by strengthening ties between *hijras* and indicating lines of alliance and belonging, creating a network of kin relations. In contrast to obligatory *guru-celā* relations, ‘relationships of love’ are created through gifts, affection, support, and care. Despite their potential for informing South-Asian non-natal or non-marital kinship relations, these relationships have only briefly been discussed in *hijra* literature. Yet, as Reddy argues, they are important for retheorising kinship relations more generally, based on choice and affection among *hijras*, as opposed to social obligation and legitimacy.

⁷⁶ Sexual relations between *hijras* are unlikely, given the established receptive role of ‘*kotis*’ in intercourse (Reddy 2005: 162-3). Conversely, Shah states that *hijras* belonging to different *akhadas* (individual ‘communities’) may marry in order to establish ‘fictional kinship’, which raises a *hijra*’s status in the community (1963: 1328).

⁷⁷ Husbands can be a source of suffering to *hijra* wives or other *hijras* in the household (see Nanda 1999: 106-109). Many *hijras* face physical and mental abuse from their husbands (Reddy 2005: 190, 194) and have to give up their earnings, even driving *hijras* to commit suicide (*ibid.*: 171-2, 179, 199-200).

iii. Local and National Organisation

Since *hijras* do not reproduce in a procreative sense, communities have a variety of ‘methods’ to ensure their survival. Scholarship and reports in the media focus on ‘recruitment’ methods, including forcing parents to hand over ‘intersexed’ babies, coercing young and curious boys to join, and the kidnapping and forced emasculation of children and adults (Sinha 1967, Sharma 1989, Hall 1995, Niazi 2008). Although it is difficult to ascertain how individuals join the community, these methods seem to be exaggerated products of the social imagination regarding the ‘corrupt’ practices deemed likely of the *hijras*. While these recruitment practices suggest coercion, ethnographic research focusing on *hijra* narratives implies that many *hijras* chose to join a community of their own accord, often as adolescents, due to cross-gender characteristics that fail to fit heteronormative expectations (Nanda 1999: 116-9; Reddy 2005: 78). Often informal interactions with *hijra* groups who show kindness and support (contrasting familial intolerance) lead to a more formal joining of the community.⁷⁸

Joining a *hijra* community provides a stable and supportive environment for many initiates who leave or are disowned by their natal families. A *hijra* living alone is subject to emotional isolation and vulnerable to violence. Living on the streets and away from community life, *hijras* are exposed to physical and sexual violence and have little economic or personal security. Most *hijras* have affiliations with specific households through their relationships their *gurus* and their own *celās*. The local level household, or *derā*, is the primary unit, consisting of a few to around twenty members, depending on the size of the property. Small towns have one or more households while larger cities might contain hundreds. Each is an independent unit where all members contribute; in return, they receive shelter, food, protection, and opportunities for work, whether ritual work, collecting alms or dues, or prostitution. The household structure replicates the natal family home and includes the *nāyak* or *ustād* (literally ‘teacher’), who is the head of the household, the *gurus* (the *nāyak*’s *celās*), and *guru*’s *celās*.

Another dimension of social organisation is ‘houses’, or ‘lineages’. These are structural—as opposed to spatial—organisations. Different households and communities belong to one of several lineages, which are distinct from one another.

⁷⁸ Sharma describes the institutionalisation of the *hijra* role as a ‘process of socialisation’ with three parts: overcoming an ‘identity-crisis’, development of identification with *hijras*, and locating oneself in a *hijra* home, accompanied by learning how to behave as a *hijra* (1989: 59). While this process seems prescriptive, many *hijras* become integrated into a community through an understanding that what they experienced was not unique (cross-gender characteristics, being ‘spoiled’ by men, and the denial and rejection of their families).

Their rituals and practices are similar from house to house, but each has been established separately and supports its own members. There are seven houses, but there is some discrepancy due to different states having different numbers of houses, with variant names. Nanda gives Laskarwallah, Chaklawallah, Lalanwallah, Bendi Bazaar, Poonawallah, Ballakwallah, and Adipur, with slight variation according to region (1999: 39). Reddy also names seven lineages, according to the literature and *hijras'* accounts. They are Lashkarwala, Sheharwala, Lallanwala, Bhendi Bazaar/Bullakhwala, Dhongriwala, Mandirwala, and Chatlawala (2005: 237, n.14). Almost all the *kinnars* interviewed in MP were evasive about the names or specificities of different *khāndāns* (the term for a 'lineage' or 'family' which was used). Only one *kinnar* named five *khāndāns* in MP: Gangarwala, Lashkarwala, Lallanwala, Bhendi Bazaarwala, and Chatlawala,⁷⁹ saying that Gangarwala, the house she belonged to, was the largest and most dominant in the country. There is some consistency between the lists, although regional variation is important. One *hijra* from Delhi spoke about its *gharānās* (literally 'family' or 'lineage'), a term she translated as 'varieties' or 'cultures'. She called them Rai, Sujani, Kalyan, and Mandi. She noted that the *gharānās* have differentiations within them, for example, she is of the Nafajgarh group of the Rai house, one of the four groups in the house.

Houses gather together for *sammelans*, which occur several times a year. Not all houses associate with one another; only certain houses and households are invited to a particular gathering. At the *sammelan* in Sagar, I met *hijras* from MP, Gujarat, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. A *sammelan* is a significant event, usually occurring to commemorate the event or anniversary of an important *guru's* death (see Jaffrey 1997: 103-4), and where *hijras* can make and formally acknowledge new relations and sort out existing problems between groups and impose sanctions for transgressions. Given the territorial claim made by households and the mobility *hijras* enjoy by moving between households, solving disputes at the occasion of a *sammelan* is vital to maintaining peace.⁸⁰ Problems often arise regarding land disputes, or the soliciting of another *celās* (see Sharma 1989: 120). Evidently certain communities maintain links and allegiances to one another and these congregations serve an important social and communal function, affirming membership of the greater *hijra* community (Nair 2000: 116 n.1).

An understanding of the general *hijra* community and specific *hijra* communities, alongside an investigation into the complexity of *hijra* kinship relations,

⁷⁹ I have based these spellings upon those given by Reddy since I did not see these names written down and was unable to ask for spellings in MP.

⁸⁰ However, Nanda writes that the most important *hijra* meetings are those within a locality, such as the resolution of a dispute or the initiation of a new recruit, at which the heads of the houses locally will meet in a *jamāt*, or 'meeting of the elders' (1999: 40). The *jamāt's* primary function is to host discussions in a similar fashion to a village *pañcāyat* (cf. Shah 1961: 1326; Sharma 1989: 119-20).

is important in order to understand how *hijras* adapt social structures and make sense of, support, and give meaning to their own communities and relationships. Throughout this chapter, I have investigated how *kinnars'* and *hijras'* sense of identity is shaped through the interrelated aspects of the historical and literary past, gender performance, religious practices, and social structures and personal relationships. *Hijras'* narratives relating to the realms of history, gender, religion, and *hijra* society provide a way for them to negotiate common stereotypes about the community and render their identity intelligible to mainstream society. They also give meaning to their identities as *hijras*. Appreciating these facets of their *hijra* identity is significant for understanding how *kinnars* were represented as a result of their political participation. In the following chapter, I focus on my fieldwork in MP and explore the participation of three *kinnars* in local elections.

Chapter Two

Kinnars in Madhya Pradesh: Fieldwork and Case Studies

I. Choosing Sites and Research Methods

From the end of 2010 and until mid 2011, I undertook fieldwork in Madhya Pradesh, central India. My aim was to gain a greater understanding of the reasons why and how *kinnars* had contested local elections successfully in this particular state. MP was an obvious fieldwork location as the state in which seven *kinnars* had been elected to public office in the last dozen years, more than any other state. I wanted to ascertain the causes behind such success and the factors that had propelled *kinnars* into participating in democratic, electoral processes. Moreover, as noted in the introduction, the majority of works written on the *hijras* are based in South India or do not claim a regional focus and there is little scholarship on the *hijras* of North and central India. As a state in which *hijra* identity has not been previously studied at length, and in which *kinnars* have been involved numerically significantly in politics, MP was a rich location in which to conduct fieldwork. I conducted my research mainly in eastern MP, from where all seven *kinnars* were elected, and I spent time in five sites: Katni; Jabalpur; Sihora; Shahdol and Anuppur; and Sagar.

Each site of fieldwork is associated with a particular *kinnar* who was elected from that town or city. Six *kinnars* were elected in 1999/2000 and one was elected in 2009. These elections were for a variety of official positions, from that of a Ward Corporator or Councillor (who is directly responsible for that particular ward and who partakes in the Municipal Town Corporation), to the Mayor of the Municipal town or city, to a Member of the Legislative Assembly, the state government in Bhopal, which is made up of individuals elected from individual districts throughout the state.

The first *kinnar* elected was Kamla Jaan,¹ as the mayor of the town of Katni Murwara in December 1999. Then there was a spate of elections in which three *kinnars* were elected: Heera Bai as a Municipal Ward Corporator in the city of Jabalpur; Meena Bai as the President of the Civic Body of the town of Sihora; and Gulshan as a Municipal Ward Corporator in the town of Bina, all entering local political bodies in January and February 2000. The next election in March 2000 was that of Shabnam Mausī, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Sohagpur seat of Shahdol

¹ I adopt the commonly used spellings of *kinnars'* names, omitting diacritics for familial terms for ease of reading (*jān*, meaning 'dear', 'beloved', or 'acquaintance'; *būā*, 'paternal aunt'; and *mausī*, 'maternal aunt', and *bāī*, referring to a lady).

district.² The last election in 2000 was that of Rani Jaan Payal as a Municipal Ward Corporator in the city of Sehore, west of Bhopal.³ Nine years later, Kamla Bua won the mayoral election for the city of Sagar in December 2009. The five locations of the five ex-politicians I was able to meet and interview became the sites of my research in MP.

There were two other minor sites for my research. The first was Becharaji, or Bahucharaji, in Gujarat. This is the site of the only temple of Bahuchara Mata, the patron goddess of the *hijra/kinnar* community. The second site was Thane, a district located in the suburbs of Mumbai. Thane proved an interesting site for comparison with MP due to the variant lives of individuals in both locations.

I conducted qualitative fieldwork primarily in Madhya Pradesh, but also in Ahmedabad, Becharai, and Thane, and employed data collection methods that included observation, taking field notes, conducting semi-structured interviews (recorded and transcribed, and non-recorded), and accessing archival material. Interviews were primarily one on one, but on occasion were small group interviews, mainly of two or three interviewees, who would answer questions together, giving their own opinions. My intention was to conduct interviews with *kinnars* who successfully contested elections in MP, alongside their supporters, critics, and local politicians. I later decided to interview local journalists, who proved informative and helpful for the study in providing information on elections and public opinion. I expected to interview people in each of the six locations (Katni, Jabalpur, Sihora, Bina,

² There is some discrepancy in the election dates given in the print media sources, especially those that reference the elections several years after they occurred. I believe the order above is the most likely order of the elections in December 1999 and 2000. Aside from *kinnars* and campaigners not knowing or remembering the exact dates of elections, there is some discrepancy in the dates given by sources. Sources written after the event state that Shabnam won the Sohagpur by-election in 1998 (Wikipedia; *Times of India* 2011), but her election is not mentioned by contemporaneous national and international newspapers until March 2000 (*British Broadcasting Corporation* 2000; *Hindustan Times* 2000). The order of elections is likely based on two newspaper articles: 'Reign of the Middle Order' (Mishra 2000), written on 28 February, and 'The Joke that Started It', *Hindustan Times* (Archives), written on 5 March 2000. Mishra states that 'voters in Katni, Sehore [sic], Bina and Jabalpur...have, by electing eunuchs as officials of their various civic bodies, expressed their despair and hope simultaneously'. The article notes that 'they have all gone through the electoral routine in January winning their seats with margins that have defied logic' (Kamla Jaan was sworn into office in January 2000, although the election was held in December 1999; this date is based on a dated, local newspaper clipping kept by a journalist in Katni). The article, published on 28th February, does not mention the election of Shabnam Mausi. After she is elected, her election is usually the main election discussed in the media due to the high-status of the position. The second *Hindustan Times* article claims that after Kamla's victory: 'the local media splashed the news, inspiring neighbouring Jabalpur, Bina and Sehore [sic] to field eunuchs as well...All the eunuchs won – Kamla Mausi became mayor of Katni, winning by 2,000 votes, and the three other eunuch candidates became corporators.' This article was printed on 5 March as part of a full page spread about the elections of *hijras* in the *Hindustan Times*. The feature article of the page concerns Shabnam Mausi's election ('The Revenge of the People'), which states the results of her victory were announced on the 26th and 27th of February.

³ I was not aware of Rani Jaan Payal or her victory until I received newspaper reports from Anuppur-based journalist Jagdish Pande in March 2011. The clippings were from the Hindi newspaper, *Navbharat* (Bhopal edition) from 2001 (Upadhyaya 2001). I then learnt of 'Payal Jaan's' election in December 2000; she is not mentioned in other print media sources. Newspaper clippings about her election can be found at www.indiarightsonline.com.

Shahdol, and Sagar). Issues relating to time and resources limited an in-depth study of every location; I decided early on during the fieldwork that it would be more productive to adopt a case study approach in order to provide a comparative framework of different elections in a particular region. I chose three of the *kinnar* politicians and localities on which to focus: Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar, and focused upon collecting data in these locations. In each location, I focused on an examination of the conditions in which *kinnars* had been elected and their political participation, choosing to foreground this subject, which did limit a study more generally about 'kinnars in MP'. Elected *kinnars* did not want to speak about their personal lives and other intimate subjects, since I had approached them to speak about their political participation, although some later chose to speak about other subjects. The case study approach therefore provided individualistic political stories of Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, focusing upon their positionality within local democratic spheres, rather than as situated as members of their *kinnar* communities. With other interviewees (voters, supporters and campaigners, critics, journalists, politicians, civil servants), interviews were designed to focus primarily on the nature of *kinnars'* campaigns, elections, and tenure, as well as their impression and assessment of the elected *kinnar*.

While interviews were important in learning about how people described and assessed the elections or their participation in them, access to archival material was useful for providing an account of events that had occurred in the past. As a result of time elapsed, many 'facts' had been forgotten or were represented in a different way. I should note that I was not concerned with having people's recollections match 'facts', as may have been recorded in newspaper accounts, for example. I found that there were often no records to check people's stories against, or that there were differing accounts of the same event. Yet, the existence of different accounts is significant: events might be represented differently over time and for particular reasons. Stories are retold and become memories, and I was curious about the ways in which people retold their stories, reflecting their contemporary position, needs, or agenda. As a result of focusing on 'stories' rather than 'facts', archival material became less important as a method during my fieldwork, while interviews and discussions became key to my research.

I conducted over sixty 'formal' interviews in MP: the majority were recorded (with permission of the interviewee). In most cases, I interviewed a single person, but in around ten cases there were two or more interviewees present. Most interviews were informal, and I followed a semi-structured approach. A formal interview approach was not suitable in many cases; I realised early on that set questions tended to invoke particular responses, which limited the information that people wanted to share. From the beginning, at the end of each interview I asked whether there was

anything else that the interviewee wanted to discuss, and this approach allowed me to see the potential in allowing for interviewees to direct the interview in as much as my questions did. In Gujarat and Mumbai, I found that less formal approaches were more appropriate. In both locations, I spent a lot of time watching and reflecting on the situation and context I was in, rather than undertaking more formalised research with interviews.

I have noted that I decided to pursue a case study approach. This approach provided a focused study of three cases, from which I wanted to analyse similarities and differences in the cases of three elected *kinnars* in Katni (1999), Shahdol (2000), and Sagar (2009). A case study approach enabled examination of how the electoral success or otherwise of each *kinnar* politician was the product of its own contextual specificities. Nonetheless, early research also revealed similarities in the ways *kinnar* identity was being reconfigured through political discourses in order to establish each as a legitimate political contender. Researching three cases enabled me to highlight the similarities between each election as well as differences that could be drawn and discussed. At the same time, a case study approach imposed limitations on my study, primarily since three case studies could not necessarily provide enough data from which to extrapolate wider theorisations concerning the entry of previously marginalised communities into state democratic processes. However, this was not an intention of the study and would ultimately conflict with a wider concern dealing with the question of how to represent specific communities with particular needs, where drawing wider conclusions that could be applied into other regional and situational contexts might negate the specificity of these individual cases. Despite acknowledging a limitation in the applicability of transporting conclusions from this study, certain discussions and frameworks in an analysis of how *kinnar* identity became mobilised within these three examples could inform wider debates and approaches concerning the construction of *kinnar* identity, and indeed the political, gendered subject, in contemporary India.

Finally, I want to discuss my positionality on a practical level in relation to my research methods and the study. Other authors have discussed female positionality in relation to research on *hijras* (Reddy 2005, Nanda 1999, Hall 1995) and I did not find any difficulties gaining access to communities in this regards. Notably, all of my interpreters or interview facilitators were male, which sometimes seemed to cause some friction, but I assess this was explained better, in most cases, due to each individual being from the location in which the interviews were conducted. I was concerned that a lack of formal introduction might hinder access to *kinnar* interviewees, but all were willing to speak to me with little information about myself or my project (although I went armed with a speech and books), especially since they saw the interview process and my research as an avenue through which they could raise their

issues. Initially, it seemed that my interpreters or interview facilitators were the ones gaining access to *kinnar* subjects, through knowledge of the *kinnar*, past meetings, or through the sharing of a shared cultural context in which both were located. However, I realised it was my positionality, as a perceived outsider, that played an important role in gaining access to interviewees. Most *kinnars* agreed to take part in interviewees as long as their name and details about them appeared in my study (which was as simple a request as their name and the name of the town where they lived). By not belonging to the local communities in which they lived, by not belonging to local social structures and networks, and by not even being 'Indian', nor speaking the language (which I had believed would be a further limitation), I was perceived as a 'real' outsider, someone who could absorb whatever they wanted to tell me, and who would transmit that information without 'local' prejudice or knowledge. It seemed that my positionality as an outsider in terms of community membership, language, nationality, and role as a researcher was important in facilitating my access to *kinnar* interviewees, as well as with non-*kinnars*. Interviewees appeared more willing to take part in my research because I did not belong to their own communities. Some were suspicious initially that I might be working for a newspaper, but when satisfied that I did not, usually by showing a business card, they were willing to speak and be recorded. The issue of access therefore was more complex than I had imagined in perceiving a lack of formal introduction, language limitations, the use of interpreters, and my positionality as an outsider were all reasons that would hinder this study.

II. Finding Politicians

Fieldwork began slowly, with failed attempts at finding an interpreter who could travel to various field sites with me⁴ and at accessing available archives in Bhopal. As the capital of MP, Bhopal was the most likely city to keep an archive of print and electronic media, but I confronted great difficulties in attaining such material.⁵ From

⁴ At individual fieldwork sites, I was aided regarding translation and assistance by various local individuals. They mostly worked at Municipal Corporation offices or were local journalists who had excellent spoken English. The only time I had a research assistant and translator was during April 2011, when Ravi Choudhary, whom I met through a friend from Delhi, travelled with me to Jabalpur, Anuppur, and Shahdol.

⁵ Most libraries in Bhopal did not store old newspapers, neither the 'Bhopal edition' nor national edition. The 'Old Town' library contained a newspaper archive, but despite visiting a few times (it was always shut) and calling the telephone number, I never spoke to anyone and thus could not pursue this source. Local libraries or journalist offices in cities or towns where elections occurred did not yield any results: for example, after waiting a few hours to get into the Anuppur library, I was told that newspapers were only kept a few months and then recycled. *Kinnars* themselves and their supporters also did not have these materials available, often explaining this due to time elapsed. I then targeted national newspaper offices in Delhi, such as the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, and *Statesman*, some of the major English-print newspapers. For the most part, these correspond with their Hindi equivalents (run by the same company). There were issues of access, mainly due to archives not being electronic and

January until May 2011, I travelled frequently between Shahdol and Anuppur, and Katni and Sagar, using Jabalpur as a middle ground. From Jabalpur, I travelled further east to Shahdol and Anuppur, and then north to Sihora, Katni, and Sagar. Initially, I intended to visit and make contacts in each town or city, to introduce myself to the *kinnar* ex-politicians, and ascertain the level of help I would need in terms of interpretation or general guidance. I wanted to establish when an interviewee might be around and available to meet, and begin to assess what sites might be significant to my research. I found that if people were around, they were willing to help, or I could arrange future appointments with them if they were not, so I would spend up to a couple of weeks in one location and then move on, intending to return later. The relevance of each site to my research depended on various factors: a *kinnar* politician's willingness to meet with me and be interviewed, what they were happy to discuss, and other people's willingness to be interviewed, or perhaps if that site offered a compelling or fruitful comparison with another case study or site of research.

I met five *kinnar* politicians, with the exception of Gulshan in Bina⁶ and Rani Jaan Payal in Sehore (the latter whom I did not know had been elected at this point). My start, in Jabalpur, was slow. I arrived on the 13th January, hot, sixteen hours delayed, and grumpy. Jabalpur is dusty and noisy and I did not know anyone. Somewhat naively, I called in at the tourist office and asked if they knew how I could find Heera Bai, who had been elected Ward Corporator eleven years before. They looked at me blankly, said they did not know what I was talking about, and offered me some brochures of nearby attractions. I considered wandering the streets and asking where 'the *hijras*' lived or trying in vain to find a phone number for Heera on the internet. It took another two days to realise that I was staying almost next to the Municipal Corporation Office. They would certainly know how to contact her, but by then, it was Saturday and I had to wait until the office opened the following week.

At the Municipal Corporation I was directed to Mr Sharm Bhatt, who had worked in the Corporation for years and held the distinguished title of 'President of the Municipal Corporation Federation'. Mr Bhatt became my guide and translator and was integral to my research in Jabalpur throughout my fieldwork, arranging and accompanying me on several interviews with Heera Bai. He also facilitated an interview with Meena Bai, the former President of Sihora, driving me the forty kilometers or so on his motorbike.⁷ Mr Bhatt found out that Heera Bai was out of town,

occasionally 'lost' folders, alongside not knowing exactly when a story might be reported, if it was even included in the national editions. Some companies had electronic archives, but could only be accessed at an unreasonable cost.

⁶ I travelled to the small town of Bina in February 2011 but was unable to make contact with Gulshan.

⁷ In order to get this meeting we had to visit a local politician's home, who knew Meena and contacted her to ask for an interview. We arrived around noon and were entertained by the politician in a vest and his *lungī*, gesticulating with his toothbrush. Later at the Municipal Corporation, Mr Bhatt explained my project to some men who worked there. While I was

so I took the train two hundred kilometers east to Shahdol town, hoping to meet Shabnam Mausī. Trying the Municipal Corporation trick again, I managed to meet a district official in charge of local development, who introduced me to one of his men, who was going to Anuppur town the following day and would arrange for me to meet Shabnam. Mr R.P. Verma and I went to Anuppur, where he introduced me to Mr G.P. Verma and his driver and his driver's friend. After sitting around in a car for an hour (and wondering quite what I had gotten myself into), we drove to her house and surrounded by these four men, in this slightly haphazard fashion, I found myself conducting my very first interview with arguably the most famous elected *kinnar* of all. I discuss this interview and further interviews below in the case studies. Floating back to Jabalpur with a sense of success at having conducted my first interview, I found that Mr Bhatt had arranged meetings with both Heera Bai and Meena Bai and within a week, I had met three out of the five politicians. I was struck by the ease with which I could locate and meet these *kinnars* and the way in which they agreed to be interviewed, despite showing up unannounced and unexpected at their homes.⁸ In the next week, I visited both Katni and Sagar and met both Kamla Jaan and Kamla Bua respectively. I discuss these and further meetings with these two 'politicians' in greater detail below. Since Kamla Bua was mayor at that time, I had to arrange a meeting with one of her secretaries, through a local doctor in Sagar who was a contact of Mr Bhatt's. This secretary was also a Public Relations Officer, Mr Rashid Hussain, who helped facilitate various meetings with Kamla Bua and current members of the Municipal Corporation. His friend, local journalist Mr Sanjay Kareer, became instrumental in conducting my research in Sagar, and became fascinated and engaged with my project.

Future trips to Jabalpur, Katni, and Sagar until May and between July and August, allowed for more extensive interviews with local politicians, journalists, and other members of the public, and the *kinnars* themselves. In April, I made a trip specifically to Shahdol and Anuppur with a translator from Delhi, where I focused on Shabnam Mausī's case.

unable to understand exactly what he said, there was laughing, joking, and staring at me with curiosity.

⁸ In this regard, I didn't have much control over the matter. Once I had explained my project to Mr Bhatt, he took over: he called Heera Bai and took me to meet her at her home. Likewise in Sihora, Mr Bhatt got hold of Meena Bai's address, so we went directly to her home. In Anuppur, Mr G.P. Verma knew where Shabnam lived, so they took me there. This also happen in Katni, where the journalist who had decided to help me arranged a meeting outside her home. The only time this did not happen was in Sagar, where there were more formal channels in place to meet Kamla Bua, the incumbent mayor. We met at her home, but only because she had arrived in Sagar late the night before, and with consent.

i. *Attending a Sammelan*

On numerous occasions, I was invited to attend a *sammelán* by Kamla Bua. ‘You will stay with me’, she would say, ‘and attend as a daughter’. Luckily on the third occasion of a *sammelán* in MP, I was able to attend. It was hosted by Kamla Bua and lasted twelve days. Everyone in Sagar was aware it was occurring, presumably because the mayor was involved and, I was told, she had managed to secure donations from the Municipal Corporation towards it. There had not been a *sammelán* in Sagar for fifteen years; Kamla Bua was using it to commemorate the death of her *guru*, Suraj. The gathering was expected to have over 3000 guests over the twelve days. I attended the last four days, when disputes were being resolved and new relationships formalised, since all the *nāyaks* had arrived. I was permitted to visit Kamla Bua’s residence in the day, as were other non-members of the community.⁹ I found that some *kinnars* were happy to speak to me, some at great length, whereas others were suspicious and shouted at non-members of the community, including newspaper reporters, who were there. Shouting and abuse only occurred on the final day of the *sammelán*, which was explained as a product of the highly tense atmosphere on that day, likely due to the resolving of disputes and the end of a busy and long twelve days.

Kamla’s spacious home had been transformed: there were mattresses and bedding placed in long lines in every room and along the corridors, where *kinnars* were sleeping, eating, chatting, and observing proceedings, including in the makeshift area that once was a courtyard and covered by a tent. There are three floors to Kamla’s house, centering around a large hall on the ground floor. The *nāyaks* formed a fluid circle in this space,¹⁰ holding discussions and performing a variety of rituals that everyone could observe. I was told in the evening, although I was not invited to attend then, that this space became an area for performance and dance. There were *kinnars* present from Delhi, Ahmedabad and Gujarat, and from all over MP, including Meena Bai, Kamla Jaan, Heera Bai and some of Heera’s *celās*.¹¹ Most *kinnars* had come for the whole gathering, with members of their own households or lineages, but many—especially the younger *kinnars* from Delhi—spoke of boredom and were happy to leave,

⁹ Alongside reporters who visited daily, there were men and women present who worked for Kamla or who had been hired to ensure the smooth running of the event, including a team of kitchen staff. There was an official photographer there, who produced photos that *kinnars* could buy from him, there were also a couple of men who controlled the audio system, so that *kinnars* in different areas of the house could hear what was going on.

¹⁰ I make this observation as I knew—or knew of—some of the *nāyaks*, including Kamla Bua. Almost all of them were wore white clothes. Reddy notes that at the time of a *guru*’s death, *hijras* mimic Hindu widows, clothing themselves in a simple white sari for the period of mourning and only wearing coloured clothes when they acquire a new *guru* (2005: 109). I knew Kamla Bua’s own *guru* had died and she dressed in white, or very simple and lightly toned clothes, often *śālvār qamīz*. Other *gurus* also adopted this simple, often white, dress. This reflects Nanda’s conclusion that ‘middle-aged’ *hijras* often wear more conservative clothes (1995: 126).

¹¹ Heera Bai is Kamla Bua’s *celā*: during the *sammelán* Kamla was often aided by Heera in the proceedings.

feeling that twelve days was a long time away from the comforts of home. While I did not conduct any formal interviews, I spoke to a variety of *kinnars* from different locations. Mr Kareer, who acted as interpreter, had said that formal interviews would not be right in this setting, since it was a holiday for many *kinnars*, and they wouldn't want to be disturbed in this way. I did find that most *kinnars* wanted to talk or tell me something and did not seem upset by my presence and that of the reporters.

Aside from daily articles in the newspapers or clips on television, the greatest point of interaction for *kinnars* with the general public was a procession through the main streets of Sagar on the penultimate day of the *sammelan*, called the *śobhāyātrā*. Kamla explained that *śobhāyātrā* is a way for *kinnars* to engage with other people in society, which is why the procession occurs (Interview, 28/8/13). Five hundred *kinnars* marched, starting and ending at Kamla's home and walking through the main streets of the city. The route was organised to be a tour of the main areas of the city, passing by various temples and mosques.

Standing on the island between the two sides of the busy street, I noticed I was one of the only women present on the whole road. Sanvariya—a young *hijra* I had met at Kamla's house—was walking on her own at the front of the procession. She came over to me and took my hand and I began to walk with her, joining the procession. From this vantage point, I could observe the procession and, thankfully, move easily up and down the street instead of being squashed among the crowds of men, brandishing their mobile phones to film the procession, who were being contained and occasionally beaten back by policemen wielding long sticks.

There were different groups of *kinnars* in the procession, although Kamla later noted that there is no specific rule as to a particular order for walking, nor dress code (Interview, 28/8/13). At the very front were a group of *kinnars*, performing traditional dance or tricks with drums or other props, including spinning a bike wheel on top of their raised arms or heads, and dancing astride two drums held by the drummers. They were accompanied by a group of musicians. Behind them was an enormous sound system on the back of a truck, playing popular Bollywood tunes, behind which were 'sexy' *kinnars*, wearing tight *śalvār qamīz* or 'Western' clothing, including short skirts and tops that revealed their shoulders or stomachs, and a lot of make-up: these dancing *kinnars*, who were grinding with and pouring water on each other, were of particular interest to the crowd due to the sexualised nature of performance. As they walked past, every male spectator was glued to the screen of his mobile phone to capture the performance, pushing and shoving to get to the front of the crowd. Next was a more formal group of *kinnars* who followed two particular *kinnars*, wearing in red and gold saris and heavily decorated with gold jewellery and marigold chains, who each carried a *kalaśa*, a three foot high, carved, ornate metal vase, on their heads. Kamla explained the use of the *kalaśa* as a part of 'Hindu' rituals. Only *celās* of the

sammelan's host can carry the *kalaśa* in the *śobhāyātrā*. A collective decision is taken to nominate the *kinnars* a week before the procession. The chosen *kinnars* must then follow strict purificatory rituals and customs to prepare them for the final day (Kamla Bua Interview, 28/8/13). Towards the end of the procession were older *kinnars* walking and cars that contained much older *kinnars* and some *kinnar* children.

Halfway through the procession was a resting point, organised by the Municipal Corporation. There was food and drinks, and a welcome opportunity to have a rest. Almost all the Municipal Corporation members were present, many bent down to touch the feet of many of the *kinnars* who passed through the gate to this area. There was a small ceremony involving the Municipal Corporation members; one *kinnar* explained that this was to do with Kamla Bua being mayor, instead of being part of the *kinnar* gathering. Many of the female members offered the *nāyaks* shawls, coconuts, and 50 Rupee notes, and in turn they were given blessings by the *nāyaks*. The procession resumed, following the same route back towards Kamla's house. This procession formally marked the end of the *sammelan*, and on the following day final 'disputes' were resolved, money was given out to cover the cost of travel, and *kinnars* began to leave Sagar.

ii. *Becharaji and Thane*

Given the importance of Bahuchara Mata for the *kinnar* community, I decided to visit the temple dedicated to the goddess, located in Gujarat. It was a hot and dusty journey by bus to the tiny town of Becharaji, or Bahucharaji, in Mehsana District. The timing of my visit to the temple was fortunate, since it coincided with the full moon festival, *Guru Purnima*, which is when the temple is at its busiest, as Bahuchara is popular among the general Gujarati population. There were thousands of people crammed into the temple complex, with several hundred—standing in the blazing sun—forming a long line to enter the inner temple to pay their respects to the goddess. Some *kinnars* live in and around the temple complex, but were unwilling to talk to me without the permission and presence of their *guru*, who was in Ahmedabad. Sitting in the temple complex, there were plenty of opportunities to talk to lay devotees, and learn more about the goddess, their relationship to her, and some of the myths associated with her. I was told variations of myths discussed in other places, and some new myths altogether. As the sun set, there was dancing and worship in the temple, and at night was the unveiling of the statue of the goddess, followed by a procession with the statue through the town. Local Gujaratis played a significant role in the local practices at the temple, while the *kinnars* sat in a group under the shade of a tree in the middle of the complex throughout the day. At night, several 'male' *kinnars* appeared, dressed in jeans and shirts, and performed dances in the middle of the crowd near the entrance to the

main sanctum, where many people had gathered to see the unveiling of the statue. Apart from a few 'male' *kinnars* from Delhi at the *sammelan* in Sagar, I had not seen a group together in this manner. My guide, Mr Turner, called them 'male *kinnars*', but they seemed closer to the '*kaḍa-cāṭla kotis*' (non sari-wearing *kotis*) described by Reddy (2005: 131), since I was not able to assess whether they identified as 'male' or not.

A stark contrast to the *kinnars* at the temple of Bahuchara are the *hijras* of Thane, Mumbai. At Delhi University, a student who was involved in LGBT activism told me about Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a well-known *hijra* in India due to her social activism,¹² including regarding transgender and *hijra* issues, and celebrity status in Mumbai. I sent off an email and got a reply from her secretary who told me to visit her at her home. After a difficult journey, I arrived at her flat. I was greeted by a pouty-faced Kamal, Laxmi's *celā*, who was far more interested in her Facebook profile at that point than me. I sat down on what turned out to be Kamal's bed, looking around at the surroundings of the small, two-room flat, including several large wardrobes full of ornate saris and western style clothing, and an enormous mirror that took up the whole of one wall. It was in this mirror that I saw Laxmi for the first time, fresh from the shower in a towel, displaying remarkable long legs. This was a different world that I had entered into, not having experienced anything near as intimate nor informal during my time in MP. Laxmi dressed herself and put on her make-up for the evening ahead, starting with the careful placement of a padded bra and the meticulous application of make up to her face, neck, and shoulders. She invited me to ask questions, but what I had prepared was cut short when she told me to watch a video that had been made for a 2010 TEDx conference about her life and the *hijra* community. On a future visit, I spent about two weeks with Laxmi in a variety of settings. I observed her social activism and work; met and spent time with other *hijras*, including Laxmi's *celās*; attended a photo shoot for an internet television programme; and socialised with Laxmi and her friends.

iii. Comparing Mumbai and MP

Spending time with Laxmi gave me insight into her life as a '*hijra*' and her particular experiences: as an advisor to a UN Civil Society Task Force, as a 'representative' of the *hijra* community in the national media, and an educated and cosmopolitan individual who lives next door to several members of her family. It is clear that Laxmi's experience of '*hijra*' identity is unlike the typical experience of many *hijras*. Observing Laxmi's life allowed me to reflect more generally on some of the obvious—but perhaps

¹² Laxmi is involved in a variety of causes, including a charity that helps get financial aid to lower-class and -caste individuals suffering from cancer, anti-smoking campaigns, and NGOs that work on behalf of tribal rights, alongside campaigning on issues pertaining to minority sexualities.

ignored—differences among members of the *hijra* community, based on individual experiences but also upon regional and urban or rural considerations. As an activist, Laxmi engages in a rights-based discourse, with the explicit purpose of creating awareness and fighting for opportunities and rights for *hijras*. This is based on her exposure to transnational rights discourses for minority sexualities and her work on rights in India and abroad. On the other hand, the *kinnars* of MP have little access to or awareness of these discourses and do not see themselves or even perhaps, to some extent, acknowledge, their place within these struggles. The differentiations among those who identify as *hijras* or *kinnars* are significant since they create a vast difference in outlook, expectation, and experience of life as a self-identified member of the community and as an individual who is identified as a member of the community. I do not mean to suggest that a division can be drawn between those who identify as *hijra* and those who identify as *kinnar*, where the former is an urban, ‘modern’ identity that draws upon transnational LGBT discourses and the latter is an identity found among rural, non-metropolitan individuals who do not know or identify with LGBT movements. Rather, I maintain that any category, whether *hijra*, *kinnar*, or transgender, contains within it a heterogeneous assortment of lived-experiences and belief systems, which can be contradictory with one another. Various identities are grouped together under a single label for the purposes of classification, most notably by the State and NGO groups, in order to extend rights and benefits to members of the ‘transgender’ community. Yet, it is important to consider differences in belief, practice, and how people identify with a particular identity category, all of which are based on the individual actor, in order to recognise contradictory—though not necessarily mutually exclusive—discourses among individuals who are identified under the same label. Laxmi and the *kinnar* politicians I met in MP provide an example of this difference, by understanding their identities in divergent ways and living contrasting lives. These differences are highlighted when a representative speaks on behalf of their community, which codifies a certain lived experience as representative of members of the group. I explore the diversity of the *hijra* or ‘transgender’ community in Chapter Five, highlighting the impossibility of conflating multiple identities that are collated under the term ‘*hijra*’ and the unintended consequences of such conflation upon community heterogeneity.

III. Case Studies: How to Elect a *Kinnar* Politician

After a few months of fieldwork, I decided to focus more closely on certain individuals and their elections, in order to explore similarities and difference between cases. The election of each *kinnar* had similar aspects, such as the mass support each campaign generated, the scale of the victory, and how each *kinnar* was represented to the public

as a suitable candidate. Yet there were important differences between each example, such as the way each *kinnar* conducted themselves in office, the lasting impressions that the public had of them, and their personalities and agendas. In the discussion below, I explore how each *kinnar* was named as a candidate, the development and success of each campaign, and a general impression of their time in and after public office.

i. *Kamla Jaan, Mayor of Katni Murwara Town, December 1999*

The first election of a *kinnar* in MP was Kamla Jaan as Mayor of Katni in December of 1999. This was the first direct election for Mayor in Katni, inasmuch as the entire electorate voted in the election, and the seat was reserved for a woman. I heard that Kamla still lived in Katni and I travelled there for the first time at the end of January. A hotel manager put me in touch with the most senior journalist in town, a twinkly eyed, kind man with paan-stained teeth called Mr Nandlal Singh. Mr Singh spoke excellent English and was a scholarly man; he became invaluable to my time there. He summoned me a couple of days later and we made the short trip on his motorbike to one of the poorer wards of town where Kamla Jaan lives. We arrived to find a small collection of people loitering in an alley, which I later learnt was the street upon which Kamla Jaan's house looked. She was sitting on a chair in the middle of the narrow way and we sat down with her. Kamla is about sixty years old with a kind face and gentle presence. Her hair was dyed red with henna and her teeth slightly paan-stained. She had covered most of her head with a lightly patterned shawl in public company and smiled as we approached. I sat down and began preparing for the interview. Suddenly I could no longer feel the sun on my back; I looked up and saw about twenty, young, Muslim men surrounding us, mostly dressed in white kurtas. They ranged in age from young boys to grown men, but all were fascinated by the sight—I imagine—of a young woman with well-known Kamla sitting in the middle of the street. The atmosphere was not threatening *per se*, but the continuous staring became unnerving and influenced the encounter. I handed Kamla Jaan the consent form to sign: Mr Singh translated for her and another journalist, Mr Arvind Gupta, seemed to advise her. Kamla cannot write, so she handed the form to Mr Gupta. He motioned for her to sign as she had been taught in office: the letter K, surrounded by a circle.

The interview itself was short and did not provide any revelations: I asked a question, Mr Singh translated, Kamla hardly said anything and Mr Gupta would begin to reply, to which she would nod or say a few words. There was a lot of confusion over the date of her election and the length of her tenure. Kamla Jaan was persuaded to fight the election by the people of Katni and they spent effort and money on her campaign on her behalf: in that sense, she was a real 'people's candidate'. Nobody

mentioned that she was unseated, although Mr Singh and Mr Gupta discussed the case brought against her and the political motivations behind it.¹³ Kamla did not want to speak about her personal life as a *kinnar*, which is unsurprising given that towards the end of the interview, the crowd had doubled in size. Although they did not interrupt, many had mobile phones out to photograph the scene and they reacted to what was being said with quiet murmurs to one another.

I do not think Kamla ever said more than one sentence or a few words at a time, and instead her answers were given by Mr Gupta and Mr Singh, and perhaps on behalf of the crowd. Kamla appeared quiet, demure, and happy to be spoken for: this seems to be symptomatic of her time in office. Kamla was represented as a figurehead, a mouthpiece for other people's political desires, and thus was a silent figure, as she was in this interview. Her silence might have been a by-product of her illiteracy since she relied on other people's help in order to campaign and serve in office, and in turn, was in a position where people may have taken advantage of her.¹⁴ The interview seemed to replicate some of the issues that were at play during her time in office in which Kamla was silent and others spoke for her, playing to the emotions and feelings of the crowd who had shown her their support. This was confirmed through discussions with other local journalists, particularly Mr Arvind Gupta and Mr Anil Tiwari, who told me stories about her campaign and time in office. Her silence could also be interpreted within the framework provided by Spivak in addressing the question of subaltern silence in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (2000). By asking whether the bourgeois theorist can 'hear' the unintelligible speech of the subaltern (as demonstrated by Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's political act, which is misunderstood by those around her such that she cannot be 'heard' or 'read'), Spivak argues that subalternity must necessarily enter the dominant (hegemonic) language, in order to become politically or discursively intelligible. Moreover, silence itself can be a reply as an act of subalternity. In Kamla's case, she maintained her silence such that she was spoken for, and learnt how to frame her demands (which may have been influenced by her supporters) in such a way that she became intelligible within the sphere of Katni local politics. Her 'real' voice, if we can claim such a subject, rarely seems to have emerged; instead she fit the mould of what was expected from her as a representative. Kamla appears not to have established

¹³ Kamla Jaan's closest rival was the BJP candidate, Alka Jain. During this interview, I was told that her father (Nirmal Chandra Jain) was a governor of Rajasthan and before that, was a senior advocate in the MP High Court and the Attorney General of MP from 1990-92. Mr Singh noted that he was an influential personality, which may have been one reason for the verdict that unseated her, although this is conjecture.

¹⁴ This was not always the case: Kamla would devise systems so as to make people accountable to her. Wanting a more efficient corporation and realising that people were not showing up for work on time, Kamla would stand at the gates of the corporation with a members list, so they would have to sign in when they arrived. In another account, Kamla found ways to test people who asked her to sign requests which she did not approve: getting them, and then another person later, to read out the petition to her and compare versions.

herself as an intelligible subject within the sphere of Katni politics, in part due to her inability to be heard or read within this different sphere.¹⁵

On this trip and later trips to Katni, other individuals furthered my understanding of what had happened in 1999 and the years after. Mr Singh allowed me to spend time in his office, where I could ask questions and interact with him and other journalists at will. Mr Singh facilitated various interviews with key figures involved in Kamla's election and tenure, including Mr Naresh Kosta and Mr Ajay Gupta, two of the men behind her successful election campaign and Mr Gupta helped represent Kamla in the case brought against her; Mr Kamendra Singh Dhakur, who submitted the petition which unseated Kamla; Mrs Alka Jain, the defeated BJP candidate in the mayoral election; and Mr Firoz Ahmed, a member of Kamla's Mayor-in-Council. Unfortunately I did not meet with Kamla Jaan again to interview her, although I did see her again at the Sagar *sammelan*. However, I chose Kamla as a case study since, as the first *kinnar* elected in MP, her victory was remarkable and the way she was represented as a '*kinnar*' to the public by her campaigners was significant. She provided a vehicle through which the public could place their hopes and desires, and this is what made her successful as a candidate. At the same time, Kamla was unable to represent herself—both through her reluctance and others speaking on her behalf—and this was evident in the interview conducted and the way in which she was represented by other interviewees in Katni.

Kamla's Campaign, Election, and Unseating

Kamla Jaan's election was 'masterminded' by a group of local businessmen who were disgruntled with ineffective, professional politicians.¹⁶ The three main individuals involved were Naresh Kosta, a tailor and shop owner, and two advocates, Ajay Gupta and Ayaz Khan, who were part of a larger group of campaigners. There had been rising public anger in Katni at the inefficiency and incompetence of the candidates that the major political parties backed, since they did not appear to know or respond to local demands. These politicians failed to develop the town sufficiently, and often engaged in corrupt practices, such as awarding building contracts to the highest bidder and taking bribes. One example given in an article appearing in the *Hindustan Times* was that the business community—which included Kosta and other local retailers—was angry because of poor civic facilities and corruption (2000). Moreover, local

¹⁵ This argument is connected to my later theorisation in chapter four of a general inability by *kinnars* to establish themselves as 'powerful' subjects within a different sphere, here, the field of local democratic politics, by transferring their social capital from the field of *kinnar* society.

¹⁶ I use the term 'professional politician' as, for many politicians, politics is a business. People commonly observed that many politicians do whatever they can to get ahead, often viewing politicians as manipulating events to serve their own interests, and using politics 'to run their business and running businesses in order to run their politics' (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11). Corruption is commonly associated with 'professional' politicians, causing anger by constituents at politicians who use the political sphere for their own gains.

politicians had proven themselves 'impotent' after winning elections, since they failed to respond to public grievances or keep campaign promises. In order to teach the politicians a 'lesson', Kosta, Gupta, and Khan decided to put forward a *kinnar* candidate, who was already viewed as 'impotent', by virtue of her *kinnar* identity (Kosta Interview, 22/2/11). As Mr Kosta put it, why elect a 'fake' *kinnar* when a 'real *kinnar*' would do?¹⁷

As the head of the main community of *kinnars* in Katni and already known to the public, Kamla Jaan was an obvious choice. Mr Kosta suggested that the public was united in support of Kamla to teach a lesson to the major political parties for failing to provide suitable candidates. The dominance of Jains in local politics has also been given as a reason for supporting a different candidate. In this election, both BJP and Congress nominated Jain candidates: Alka Jain and Aradhana Jain respectively. The former MLA had also been a Jain. A *Hindustan Times* article, published in the national edition a few months after the election, suggests that Kamla's campaign was an 'opportunity' for the public to teach the Jain community a lesson (5 March 2000). Kamla was presented as a symbol for public anger (Gupta Interview, 30/1/11) and her campaign quickly gained support. Supporters also covered her campaign costs, including leaflets bearing her election symbol of a earthen pot (*maṭkā*), since Kamla had no money of her own to fund the electioneering. Her campaign was different to previous campaigns by being based primarily on word of mouth and supporters going door-to-door and asking for votes. It was a simple and modest campaign. On the day that the nomination papers were to be filed, a small procession was held from the railway station down the main road of the city. The local press covered this story and it was the first time Kamla and her campaign appeared in the papers, since they did not have the money to 'advertise' prior to this.¹⁸ The press only covered the story since the filing of nomination papers proved that her campaign was serious: it had previously been perceived as a joke. Since Kamla did not have transport of her own, her campaign team hired a local auto-rickshaw on which she and her team stood, appealing to the crowd for votes (Tiwari Interview, 22/2/11).

Mr Nandlal Singh told me that everyone contributed something to the campaign, making her a true 'people's candidate'. One way of advocating Kamla's candidacy was through the use of slogans, such as '*kamal nahīn, Kamla cāhie; pañc nahīn, chakkā cāhie*' ('[we] don't want the lotus,¹⁹ [we] want Kamla; [we] don't want the palm,²⁰

¹⁷ It transpired that Mr Kosta had a further reason to field an alternative candidate instead of supporting the Congress party candidate, Aradhana Jain: his father had been denied opportunities to contest previous elections (*Hindustan Times* 2000).

¹⁸ Advertising or securing coverage in local newspapers is common in municipal elections. The amount of space the candidate receives is in proportion to the money paid: local journalists said the rate was around Rs 30,000 for one full page for one day.

¹⁹ The lotus is the symbol of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

²⁰ Literally 'five', this term refers to the palm of the hand, the sign of the Congress Party.

[we] want a *kinnar*'.²¹ Supporters also utilised the myth in which Lord Rāma blesses *kinnars* and prophecies that future generations will rule. Although interviewees laughed when they mentioned the story and said that voters did not believe it (Singh Interview, 28/1/11), the myth attracted voters to Kamla's campaign because Kamla was represented as fulfilling the prophesy of *kinnar* rule. Such rhetoric popularised Kamla's campaign, and supporters said that she became a public figure as soon as she was put forward as a candidate and they knew that they had generated enough support to get her elected.

The mayoral election was held in December 1999. Kamla won the election with 33.05% of the vote, beating her nearest rival, Alka Jain, by just under 2000 votes.²² She was sworn into office in January 2000. Since she had no experience of politics and was illiterate, she was reliant upon the support of the men who had run her campaign: Naresh Kosta, Ajay Gupta, and Ayaz Khan. These men became involved in day-to-day matters in public office and local politics alongside Kamla. Sceptics worried about their influence. Journalist Nandlal Singh, for example, noted that, in his opinion, these men might have 'mistreated' Kamla by taking advantage of her position for their own gains (Gupta Interview, 30/1/11). He suggested that Kamla's inexperience hindered her at the start of her tenure. Moreover, in the role of mayor, other individuals advised and 'pulled' her in different directions (*ibid.*). Firoz Ahmed, a member of the Mayor-in-Council during Kamla's tenure, spoke about many of her advisors 'petty interests' (Interview, 27/2/11). However, other accounts credit Kamla's own abilities and ways of ensuring she was not simply a figurehead. Kamla apparently could recognise documents not signed by her, even though she was illiterate. She maintained she could recognise her signature, despite signing it in a variety of ways during the initial few months in office (Mishra 2000). Local journalist Anil Tiwari described the system she devised to know exactly what she had approved, getting the person making the request read it out loud and then ask another person later to read the same document to her. Thus, she could check how accurately the petitioner had described it, before she agreed to it (Interview, 22/2/11).

Kamla's tenure was characterised by her desire to drive out corruption from the Municipal Corporation and to attend to practical day-to-day activities. She did not seem to attempt to benefit from her role as mayor: she remained in the same house in a relatively undeveloped ward and preferred riding on a back of a motorcycle to a car. Kamla took her role seriously: in the morning, she took an attendance register of those who worked at the Corporation, forcing people to come in on time and do their jobs

²¹ The term '*chakkā*' literally means 'six' but is a slang word for a *kinnar*.

²² Kamla Jaan won 23, 215 votes (33.05%). Alka Jain, BJP candidate, won 21,418 (30.99%). Aradhana Jain, Congress candidate, won 12,943 (18.42%). Three other candidates contested the election. This data is from the notebooks of Mr Nandlal Singh, copied from newspaper articles published at the time of election.

(Tiwari Interview, 22/2/11). She was not afraid to berate people for failing to take their job seriously (Bearak 2001, Mishra 2000). Another thing that seems to have singled Kamla out from other politicians was her availability. Numerous interviewees explained that mainstream politicians on the whole are not available for mass contact with those in the Corporation or the electorate, whereas Kamla Jaan was always available (Tiwari Interview, 22/2/11). During her tenure, important projects were started, such as the Rajiv Gandhi Shopping Complex by the railway station; New Circuit House, a guest house for government officials; and toilet blocks in many wards. Her tenure was deemed as relatively successful, particularly by her supporters, campaigners, and those who worked with her at the Municipal Corporation. Any impression of her tenure reflects the views of those who were invested in her electoral victory or advised her whilst in office. Her inexperience and illiteracy nonetheless hindered her ability to bring about the lasting changes she desired and she was further encumbered by not belonging to Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or any other party, and therefore could not ensure broader support in the Corporation for many of her plans.

During the campaign Kamla enjoyed wide support, but interest in her tenure decreased whilst she was in office. This may have been due to the slow pace of development, understandable given Kamla's lack of experience in municipal politics and her lack of education, as well as a lack of party support. Within a month of the election,²³ Kamendra Singh Dhakur filed a petition in the Katni District Court, saying that he believed that *kinnars* should not come under the category of 'women' (Interview, 26/2/11). The petition mirrors an initial query that had arisen on the day of the nominations. The Collector refused to take her paper because the seat was reserved for a 'woman'. This problem had been foreseen: when I asked campaigners Naresh Kosta and Ajay Gupta why they had selected Kamla Jaan (and not another *kinnar*), they answered they had picked her because the seat of mayor was reserved for a woman and she was registered 'as a woman' in the voter list (Interview, 22/2/11). In response to the Collector's refusal, the Chairman of the Municipality argued on Kamla's behalf, telling the Collector he could not refuse her nomination on the grounds that it was for the courts to decide whether a *kinnar* could file a nomination for a seat reserved for a woman. Her nomination was thus accepted and it did become a question for the courts. The petition filed by Mr Dhakur stated that Kamla had contested a seat reserved for a woman but that she was registered on the electoral roll as 'male'. *Kinnars* can identify as male or female and register as they choose, according to a 1994 direction from the Election Commission. The issue raised by this petition was that the electoral roll for 1999/2000 has two entries listed with the name 'Kamla Kinnar'. One is listed as female,

²³ The time limit for filing election petitions after the election is declared in the government gazette.

with unknown father's name (*ajñāt*). The other is listed as male, with the father's (or *guru's*) name as Nihora. There is a difference of three years in age between the two. Ajay Gupta, one of Kamla's legal advisors, argued that Kamla is the female *kinnar*, and that when the male *kinnar's guru*, Nihora, died, this *kinnar* left Katni. The petition by Mr Dhakur stated that Kamla Jaan is the male *kinnar*, since he believed both names to be for one and the same *kinnar* (Interview, 26/2/11).²⁴ The question therefore, for the court, was to decide whether Kamla was the male or female *kinnar* listed, which would have affected whether she was allowed to stand for the reserved seat.

The trial to hear the petition²⁵ lasted two and a half years, during which Kamla continued serving her term. The case was delayed because extra petitions were filed at both the Katni District Court and High Court in Jabalpur by Kamla and her legal advisors. The trial itself was distressing²⁶ and the burden of time and money weighed heavily on Kamla. Although unverified, it was rumoured that she was 'forced' to take bribes in order to fight the costly court case, especially in the High Court, where Kamla had filed an appeal. Ultimately, the case detracted from her ability to perform as mayor. Mr Gupta argued that the case damaged her reputation, through difficult questioning and reliance on the testimony of witnesses, particularly the oral testimony of one man, who worked on Alka Jain's mayoral campaign. The witness testified that he had seen Kamla Jaan lift her sari during a *badhāt* performance and that she had a male organ; Mr Gupta pointed out that he believed this to be unreliable testimony (Gupta Interview, 25/2/11). However, the case, Mayur Suresh argues, established Kamla's identity as a *hijra* and therefore as a castrated man. Since Kamla refused to undergo a medical test citing a violation of modesty, there was no medical way to determine whether she was a (castrated) man or woman. Suresh argues that the court then turned to the question of succession, establishing that Kamla was the *celā* of Nihora and succeeded her *guru*, and was therefore a *hijra* because only *hijras* are entitled to the parentage of their *guru* and only *hijras* can be heirs to the *guru's* property (2011: 382-3). Referencing a variety of sources, the court defined a *hijra* as a 'castrated man' (2011: 386).²⁷ Moreover, this

²⁴ It is not uncommon to be listed multiple times on the electoral roll. The main electoral roll is kept at the Katni Collectorate and a secondary roll is compiled every year: during a particular period of time people can add a name, delete one, or amend their details. These requests comprise the secondary roll and the next year they are added to the primary roll, and a new secondary roll is begun. There is only a short time in which to deal with such requests and it is often difficult to verify data, especially before electronic lists, so the onus is on voters and not the authority to register correctly. Therefore, it is not uncommon that there are overlaps and multiple entries on electoral lists (Selvendran Discussion, 5/7/11).

²⁵ There was a second petition, filed by another defeated candidate, Aradhana Jain. This petition stated that the election should be declared null and void and that Alka Jain (the 'runner-up') should not be automatically elected.

²⁶ The court demanded a medical examination in order to determine her sex. Kamla refused to give consent. Interviewees told me that Kamla was also subject to 'immoral' and 'obscene' questions about her gender, saying that she was disgraced.

²⁷ Siddharth Narrain notes that the judge quoted from the 'Shatpath Bhahman, the Mahabharata, the Manusmriti, and the Kamasutra' and historical sources to establish *hijras*'

judgment established that Kamla was the male *kinnar*, given that she was the *celā* of Nihora, corresponding to one of the two listed individuals under the name ‘Kamla Kinnar’. Thus, the petition ruled that Kamla could not have contested the reserved seat legally since she was a castrated male and was listed on the electoral roll as a man.

Kamla Jaan was unseated on 29th August 2002 by the Election Tribunal of Katni, presided over by Additional District Judge Virendra Singh with the ruling that Kamla was ‘technically’ male (*Economic Times* 2003). Justice S. P. Khare of the Madhya Pradesh High Court upheld this judgment in February 2003, maintaining that Kamla was a ‘male’ and was therefore not entitled to contest the election as the seat was reserved for female candidates (McGivering 2003; *Economic Times* 2003).²⁸

Kamla Jaan continues to live in Katni and maintains her role as the *guru* of a group of *kinnars*. She has since returned to her life and career as before her time as Mayor, earning a living from performing *badhāī* work at birth ceremonies and marriages.

ii. *Shabnam Mausi, MLA for Sohagpur, March 2000*

Shabnam Mausi (*Mausi* means ‘aunty’) was the first *kinnar* I met during fieldwork. Flanked by the two Mr Vermas, a driver and his curious friend, we drove down the narrow streets towards Shabnam’s house. By the time we got out of the vehicle, the car blocked the entire street. Shabnam lives in a two-storey house, which also contains a temple to the late Sai Baba, a popular Indian saint who has both Muslim and Hindu followers. She lives alone in Anuppur, which is uncommon for many *kinnars*.²⁹ We

gender (2009: 460). This references the discussion Chapter One relating to the construction of *hijra* identity vis-à-vis such sources.

²⁸ After Kamla was unseated from mayoral office, an election was held on 30th December 2002. Asha Kohli, representing the BJP, won with 20,570 votes (39.26%). Raj Kumai Jain, representing Congress, came second, with 12,758 votes (24.35%). The 2002 election was interesting in that five independent candidates contested it (out of eight candidates), compared to two independent candidates in the 1999 election. Kamla’s victory seemed to inspire other independent candidates to run, despite the usual defeat of independent candidates.

²⁹ Shabnam explained that she could not trust other people, thinking they were after her money or belongings. She said that she was the first *kinnar* who had lived in Anuppur, having been sent by her *guru* to manage this area (the area between Buhar, district Shahdol, to Bankat Nagar, district Anuppur) so no other *kinnar* could work here without her permission. Other people in Anuppur said another *kinnar* had lived there previously and Shabnam had taken over from her (or in some accounts, driven her out of Anuppur and claimed the town for herself). At another time, Shabnam said she did not like living with other *kinnars* because she did not like the way they behaved, the way they spoke, and their lifestyle choices. This comment came after we were discussing that *kinnars*’ sexual relationships with men; I asked how their *gurus* felt about such behaviour and Shabnam said that some also behaved in this fashion: she condemned such behaviour, saying that as a ‘religious’ person she did not perform such acts. She also mocked certain rituals, including the mother-daughter relationship ceremony. Evidently Shabnam’s religious beliefs played an important part in her life. She built the temple to Sai Baba in her house after her tenure as MLA. She explicitly refers to herself as Hindu, unlike many other *kinnars* I met (who identified as Muslims, or said they believe in ‘all’ faiths), clearly representing herself as a religious person. Despite wanting approval from others, Shabnam also does what

went upstairs to the main room, which contains the shrine to Sai Baba, and which leads off to the private areas of the house where Shabnam lives. The four men and I were invited to sit on the floor and Shabnam pulled up a low stool. She is quite a large and imposing person, but was happy that we had come to see her and welcomed us into her home. Her curly hair was scraped back into a bun and she was wearing a loose *śalvār qamīz* with a cardigan. After formalities and tea, we were permitted to begin our interview. In this initial meeting, I hoped to discuss some of her life experiences and her time in politics: I began by asking questions but this soon became frustrating, since both Mr Verma and the driver's friend attempted to translate and give their version of her story. Shabnam called for quiet, stating that she would tell the whole story, and then we could ask questions.

Shabnam Mausi has an important presence: when she spoke or raised her voice it was enough to get everyone to be quiet immediately and listen. She began by telling us about her childhood and teenage years and then explained how she had come to politics and been elected. She was born to a Brahmin police chief in Mumbai, but was ordered to leave her natal home around ten years old to join the *kinnars* because she began to act like a '*kinnar*', including dancing and wearing female clothes. During her teenage years, Shabnam was trained in classical dance and by seventeen had joined the film industry and performed dance in many Bollywood films. However she rejected that lifestyle and joined a *kinnar* community in Uttar Pradesh. She was then sent to eastern MP but faced many difficulties: she said the people were unfamiliar with her '*kinnar*' business and this caused many problems. At this time, there was discontent with local politicians. She said that the people of Shahdol asked her to contest the by-election for the Legislative Assembly seat³⁰ because they wanted an 'original' *kinnar*, as opposed to the 'fake' *kinnars* that they had as politicians: that is, the individuals who served them in the past were 'incompetent', as *kinnars* are assumed to be. She easily won the election and joined the Legislative Assembly in Bhopal in 2000 for two and a half years. We spoke briefly about projects she had begun and completed—mainly developmental work for Shahdol and the surrounding areas—and the difficulties she faced. She mentioned that she applied to the central government to make a reservation category for *kinnars*, although there was no outcome to this petition.³¹

she wants: she later said that she didn't want to live by anyone else's rules and this extended to the rules of the *kinnar* community itself. On the other hand, when I spoke to other *kinnars* about Shabnam Mausi, it seemed evident that as much as Shabnam has rejected community practices, they have also, in part, disassociated themselves from her. They say she has left them and acts as she pleases.

³⁰ The by-election was called because the sitting MLA passed away halfway through the term. Shabnam was elected in March 2000 and served until mid 2002, when the usual election cycle resumed (the typical term is five years).

³¹ This is an important question, given the ambiguity about *hijras* or *kinnars*' gender in relation to participating in politics. After the 1994 direction that *hijras* could register on the electoral roll as male or female, Shabnam wrote to the Chief Election Commissioner enquiring in which category *hijras* were classified (Narain 2003). Self-identification is not necessarily accepted:

Shabnam asked me to look at her private rooms and to see photos of her when she was younger, while the men waited in the main room. Her house is adorned with large printed pictures of her throughout her life: a beautiful individual stared back through the pictures, proud and assured. Shabnam began crying, showing me on her body where she had been attacked at various times in her life, on her face, on her stomach: scars that narrated a very different story. Shabnam seemed to be a complex individual: a lonely figure who, for a moment in time, was celebrated and admired but now leads an isolated life. The figure described by the locals of Anuppur and Shahdol also demonstrated this binary: part adored and revered, part feared and loathed.

A longer trip to Shahdol and Anuppur in April provided more information on Shabnam's case. My interpreter, Ravi, and I spoke to a variety of individuals involved in her election. I met with a few local journalists—Ajit Mishra, Jagdish Pande, Chandra Shekhar Tripathi, and Kailash Aggarwal—who spoke at length about her portrayal in the media and the conditions at the time of her election, including public anger and the desire for change. Numerous stories depicted her in a bad light: Shabnam is an infamous figure in Anuppur and naturally there are stories and rumours about her. Some are sympathetic, but many are vicious in nature, painting her as another greedy and ineffective politician. These stories are intertwined with how people view *kinnars* more generally, assuming that they all engage in sex work, or are greedy for money. It became evident that since *kinnars* are generally viewed in a negative fashion, people had no qualms in pushing Shabnam into politics for their own gain: to get one up on local politicians. We interviewed local politicians, including Shankar Prasad Sharma, an elderly local ex-politician and social activist who gave Shabnam advice and showed kindness to her cause at the time of her election. We tried to meet both of the MLA candidates she defeated but both were unavailable for interview.

On this trip, Shabnam was pleased to see us and the atmosphere was more relaxed and open: Ravi showed Shabnam all the due deference she would expect and I believe it helped that there were only two of us present at this time. We did not discuss her time in politics but other subjects including religious belief; gendered and sexual questions; naming traditions among *kinnars*; and the *kinnar* community at large including the structure of the community. I found that she was also curious about transsexuals in England, and she wished to visit, so she naturally asked questions as well.

Kamla Jaan and Kamla Bua were both unseated by petitions that challenged their gender status. *Kinnar* Asha Devi, ex-Mayor of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, ran for the seat reserved for a woman in 2000: her initial nomination was contested and she was unseated in 2003. Despite these unseatings, there has been no ruling on whether *kinnars* can contest seats reserved for women. A newspaper article in March 2012 noted that the Delhi election commissioner was seeking legal opinion on the issue, after being confronted by a groups of *hijras* who requested that *hijras* be allowed to contest seats in municipal corporation reserved for women (Yadav 2012).

Shabnam presents herself as a strong individual, who has suffered hardship in her life, but who takes advantage of situations and benefits from her experiences. Her electoral success as a Member of the Legislative Assembly was significant, and despite being taken advantage of by the public as a figure to mock other politicians, Shabnam's character testifies that she did not always accept the way she was portrayed or treated.

Shabnam's Campaign, Election, and Tenure

Shabnam Mausi was elected in March 2000 as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Madhya Pradesh and held the Sohagpur seat in Shahdol district. This was a by-election held when the sitting MLA, Krishpal ('K. P.') Singh, passed away. The Legislative Assembly of MP is based in Bhopal and MLAs who are elected from districts across the state go to Bhopal and the assembly to represent their constituents.

Shabnam has lived in Anuppur town for over thirty years and still lives there today. She faced difficulties when she first moved to Anuppur from Uttar Pradesh, since she was on her own and the public disliked the *badhāt* work she did as a *kinnar*. Her image changed over time: people considered her different from 'usual' *kinnars*, as a more noble and sober individual (Mishra Interview, 4/4/11). This image explains why she was persuaded to contest the MLA by-election by the people of neighbouring Shahdol town.³² Shabnam had decided also to contest the seat herself and sought advice from local politicians as to whether and how she should fight (Sharma Interview, 5/4/11). Her campaign was an instant success. People campaigned on her behalf and gave donations to her. Shabnam mortgaged her jewellery to help cover the campaign costs. It was a simple campaign, with hardly any campaign materials such as flyers or posters. Instead, the campaign relied on word of mouth, with Shabnam going door to door. On one occasion, Shabnam used funds that could have been spent on her campaign to pay the electricity bill of Burhar Municipality, a town in Shahdol district (Mishra Interview, 4/4/11). She proved with this act that she would work for the electorate, and not simply fulfil her own desires through entering politics. Shabnam was persuaded to contest the election because the public in Shahdol desired it, due to anger against experienced politicians who failed to develop the district adequately according to public needs, such as developing educative facilities, roads, sanitation,

³² The Anuppur seat of Shahdol district was reserved for people belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category, so Shabnam could not contest this seat. At the time of the election in 1998 and the by-election in 2000, the only unreserved MLA seat in Shahdol district was in Sohagpur (Anuppur district became a separate district in August 2003). When Shabnam filed her nomination paper, she listed herself as a Brahmin. It is significant that the Sohagpur constituency seat was deemed the most powerful out of the eight seats in Shahdol district. It was the most powerful seat because the individual who held the Sohagpur seat usually became a Minister in the MP cabinet. For example, K. P. Singh, the MLA before Shabnam Mausi, had been a Congress Minister in the state cabinet. Shabnam Mausi could not become a Minister because she held the post as an Independent. Journalist S.P. Sharma noted that the eight seats were usually divided among the Congress and BJP and whichever party held the Sohagpur seat would be supported by the other party MLAs in order to receive a post of Minister. This, in turn, ensured funds and development in their own constituencies (Interview, 5/4/11).

and overall infrastructure. 'They are men only in name', Shabnam declared, 'otherwise they are actually *kinnars*' (Interview, 20/1/11), alluding to the political and rhetorical conflation of impotence and incompetence with *kinnar* identity. Such a declaration is, to a degree, self-loathing, by establishing *kinnar* identity as impotent. Moreover, impotence is interpreted here, including by Shabnam, as a negative quality, which sustains a reading of *kinnar* identity as a curse (as discussed in chapter one in relation to myths about Bahuchara).

This sort of metaphor is commonly used for incompetent politicians, who are referred to as '*hijras*' or '*kinnars*' due to their inability to meet campaign promises or voters' expectations. The first newspaper article written about Shabnam appeared in *Deshbandu*, a local newspaper in Anuppur.³³ The article argued, in jest, that she should contest the MLA seat. The sentiment behind the article mocked the current situation, asking why people should give votes to 'fake' *kinnars* when there is a real *kinnar* who could fight the election.³⁴ During the campaigning period, the Congress Chief Minister of MP, Digvijay Singh, came to Shahdol to campaign for Brijesh Singh, son of the late K. P. Singh. A rally was held and twenty thousand people attended. Singh announced, 'you can vote for anybody, but you should not vote for this *hijra*' (Mishra Interview, 4/4/11). Rather than warning people away, his speech garnered support for Shabnam. In reply to his statement, she echoed his words, asking why voters should choose a 'fake *hijra*', when a 'real' one is available (Shabnam Interview, 30/1/11; Mishra Interview, 4/4/11; Sharma Interview, 5/4/11). Despite the light-hearted nature of such rhetoric, which was self-deprecating to *kinnar* identity, playing on their assumed impotence, it became clear that Shabnam would win the election, to the dismay of candidates Lallu Singh (BJP) and Brijesh Singh. On the final Saturday before the election, Shabnam arrived at Labour Chowk, the local market. All the labourers thronged around her, away from Lallu Singh and Brijesh Singh. Journalist Ajit Mishra proclaimed it was then that people realised that nobody could stop her winning this victory (Interview, 4/4/11). It was not just lower-caste and lower-class voters who supported her; the general population, including well-educated and successful individuals, voted for her as well (Sharma Interview, 5/4/11).

Shabnam Mausi won the by-election with a landslide of 17,863 votes, receiving more votes than both the BJP and Congress candidates combined (*Hindustan Times* 2000; Reddy 2003: 167). Similar to the situation with Kamla Jaan in Katni, there was

³³ This newspaper secured Shabnam's victory. The local correspondent, Bhaskar Rao Rokde, was the Shahdol edition editor, and had become interested in Shabnam's story. I noted above that politicians pay to have campaign news included in local newspapers. Shabnam never paid but *Deshbandu* did it voluntarily, due to Rokde's interest in Shabnam's candidacy. According to local journalists, *Deshbandu* was estimated to have higher circulation during the time of Shabnam's campaign.

³⁴ The journalist who told me this story, Ajit Mishra, noted that the title 'Mausi' was used in this article and that nobody had called her 'Mausi' before. After that, the title was taken as part of her name (Mishra Interview, 4/4/11).

clear public resentment towards experienced but ineffective local politicians and anger at the political parties for failing to pick candidates who reflected the voters' wishes. In Shahdol particularly, the electorate were upset about the repetition of candidates. Two particular politicians in recent memory had always been given tickets by the two major parties: Lallu Singh for the BJP and K. P. Singh for the Congress Party. When K. P. Singh died, the party gave his son, Brijesh, their nomination, although he had little experience of politics and was an advocate by profession. Both Lallu Singh and Brijesh Singh are members of the Thakur caste (*Hindustan Times*, 5 March 2000). A 'move' against Thakur contenders also has been given as a reason for Shabnam Mausi's electoral success, since they dominated local politics in Shahdol district (Mishra, Interview, 4/4/11; *Hindustan Times* 2000; Anonymous Interview 4/4/11; Tripathi Interview, 6/4/11), despite the Thakur caste only constituting a small percentage of Shahdol and Anuppur districts. After the election, a *Hindustan Times* article noted that it was the lower castes, especially Dalits, who hailed Shabnam's victory as their own, especially with no chance of a Dalit being nominated by mainstream parties. Perhaps her subjectivity allowed for a shared resentment against individuals who represented an upper-caste or -class position, stemming from a shared subaltern status. The article quoted Dalits in Shahdol as saying: 'we've defeated the Thakurs with a eunuch' (5 March 2000).³⁵ However there did not appear to be an established relationship between Shabnam or other *kinnars* in Shahdol and Anuppur and Dalits or other lower castes as a result of this election,³⁶ although their support played a prominent role in her electoral success. Given general resentment from large numbers of voters towards Thakur candidates, Anuppur-based journalist Ajit Mishra said that the victory can be attributed to 'negative' voting, in the sense of voting against, rather than for, a candidate. Thus, it was not a victory for Shabnam Mausi but a defeat of local politicians. A further reason—given by local politicians and journalists alike—is that disgruntled local politicians turned against their own parties because they were angry at not obtaining party tickets to contest the election and wanted to discredit those who had received the party's support (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11). The *Hindustan Times* article (5 March 2000) discusses internal Congress politics as a factor. Ajit Yogi, a Congress spokesman and tribal leader, was attributed with having engineered Shabnam's victory 'in revenge' for his defeat in the Shahdol parliamentary

³⁵ Shahdol-based journalist Kailash Aggarwal stated that resentment towards professional politicians was the main reason for Shabnam's success, but that her campaign created an 'angle of enjoyment', through fielding such an unlikely candidate against the professional Thakur candidates and due to the fact that she might win (Interview, 6/4/11).

³⁶ One limitation of this study, due to time primarily, was that I was unable to research in more depth various communities who made up local electorates, such as, for example, the Dalit voters in Shahdol and their impressions of, including continuing support, of Shabnam as an electoral representative, given the unlikelihood of the nomination of a Dalit candidate by mainstream parties (without reservation quotas).

constituency in the last general election. This defeat, in turn, is speculated as having been caused by the Thakur lobby.³⁷ In addition, there had been ‘positive’ press reaching Shahdol and Anuppur about Kamla Jaan’s election.³⁸ The press portrayed her as a candidate who could serve her constituents and her victory was read as a joke at the expense of local politicians. Kamla and her campaigners had been victorious, and this—alongside *kinnars*’ elections in neighbouring Jabalpur, Bina, and Sihora—might have inspired voters in Shahdol.³⁹ It was not necessarily the case that anyone from a subordinate community could contest this election successfully: in the context of the Shahdol by-election in 2000, no other candidate proved that they were more capable than Shabnam. Moreover, no other candidate commanded the same symbolic value that Shabnam did in the minds of the electorate: her candidacy allowed them to reject other candidates and make the point that the voters desired substantial change regarding the candidates who were chosen as party representatives.

Although Shabnam was persuaded to contest the MLA election on behalf of the constituents of Shahdol, she maintains also that she did it on behalf of other *kinnars*. Once elected, she applied to the central government to establish a category of reservation for *kinnars* in order to address their deplorable condition. Shabnam said she wanted to address the fact that the government does not respect *kinnars* or aid them in any way, failing to see that they have value as individuals (Interview, 30/1/11).

Shabnam completed the final two and a half years of the MLA term. During this time, she managed to secure funds for Shahdol district more generally and completed several works, including general development works such as community and school buildings, and extending cement and concrete roads and providing electricity to rural areas. She also gave money towards the Patrakār Bhavan, the journalist building, in Shahdol (Tripathi Interview, 6/4/11). Mr Tripathi, a Shahdol-based journalist, noted that before that act no other politician had given money for such buildings. At the same time, other individuals assessed that very little happened during her tenure, despite knowledge of such donations and developments. This fits in

³⁷ Shabnam herself said that a former Congress state minister, Bisahul Singh, asked her to contest and gave her Rs 10,000 for the campaign, acting on Yogi’s behalf (*Hindustan Times* 2000). This rumour caused a rift between Shabnam and Anuppur-based Bisahul Singh, which might have been the context for their famous Assembly scuffle (mentioned below) (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11).

³⁸ For example, Anuppur-based journalist Ajit Mishra said that the press in Katni spoke highly of Kamla after her election, producing positive impressions about *kinnars* in public office, portraying them as lacking greedy tendencies and therefore less likely to be corrupt (Interview, 4/4/11). At the time of Shabnam’s campaign, four *kinnars* had been elected in MP, of which Kamla Jaan’s victory was cited the most frequently and she was perceived favourably in the media. The example of Kamla may have been mentioned more than the others because of the comparative seniority of the post, or because she was viewed as the most demure of those elected and therefore a more moderate example of a *kinnar* in a position of political power.

³⁹ For example, in the *Hindustan Times* after Shabnam’s election, a story appeared alongside the main article on Shabnam about Kamla Jaan’s election entitled ‘The joke that started it’ (2000). The article begins: ‘It all began in Katni’ and later, ‘The local media splashed the news, inspiring neighbouring Jabalpur, Bina, and Sehora [*sic*] to field eunuchs as well’.

with stereotypes of *kinnars*' assumed incompetence and was given as an overall impression of Shabnam's tenure, despite evidence of development in Shahdol. Shabnam set out to develop the district; this is evidenced by her explicit desire to form a personal connection with Digvijay Singh, the Congress Chief Minister of MP, and this was a politically expedient move. At a ceremony in his home in Bhopal, Shabnam tied a *rākhī* band around his wrist to denote the closeness of a relationship between a brother and sister, ensuring his help and support in future matters in the Legislative Assembly (Shabnam Interview, 20/1/11; Mishra Interview, 4/4/11).⁴⁰ By ensuring good relations with the Chief Minister, Shabnam could get him to support her work and ideas. S.P. Sharma, a local politician in Anuppur, described how this connection with the Chief Minister, and other important and influential members of the Assembly such as the speaker, Shri Niwas Tiwari, were indicative of her ability as a politician. She proved that she was 'shrewd', drawing on aspects of her '*kinnar*' identity to further her political identity. Mr Sharma noted that Shabnam could 'go anywhere': to the governor, to the home of the speaker of the Assembly, and to any of the secretaries of the officers and ministers of the Assembly. He explained that people thought that they should do whatever she asked, since they knew they would suffer if they rejected her or her plans (Interview, 5/4/11). I was told about several incidents from anonymous sources where Shabnam would want to get something done or have something, but was refused initially. She would pressure the individual until she got her way: this extended to attempts to get money or permission for development plans she had, donations for the temple she built in her home, or items that she desired that belonged to other people. I want to make clear that none of these accounts can be verified, but taken together, they build a picture of the way she was perceived by those who worked with her in the Assembly and in Shahdol district: as a *kinnar* who had made it into local politics, but who used people's stereotypical assumptions of characteristics and behaviour deemed likely of a *kinnar* in order to get what she wanted. This strategy worked: Shabnam capitalised on the way people viewed her as a *kinnar* and thus ensured that people cooperated with her. My impression was that people thought this about her and maintained this view, rather than basing their assessments on her personality, or perhaps even, her political prowess.

Supporters say that she conducted herself well, whereas those who did not support her or were wronged by her deem her tenure to have been unproductive. Although capable, Shabnam had no political experience and no party backing, and this factored against her ability to be effective in the MP Assembly and in development works for Shahdol district. Shabnam's term was short compared to a normal MLA term, so assessments that 'nothing was achieved' do not necessarily indicate her

⁴⁰ Kamla Jaan had performed this same act after she was elected, which had been conceived of by Mr Kosta.

ineffectiveness as a politician. Shabnam has been criticised for behaviour that was expected of a *kinnar* and not of a 'politician', such as an incident where she apparently attacked a fellow MLA from Shahdol district with a slipper in the Assembly in Bhopal.⁴¹ This scuffle was motivated by the issue over the potential district status of Anuppur, instead of it remaining a part of Shahdol district.⁴² This behaviour was condemned in the Assembly as unbecoming of an MLA, as well as 'improper' by the *kinnar* community in MP, who fined her over the incident (*NavBharat* 2001: 3).⁴³ One interviewee said that people perceived her as a *kinnar* first and foremost, so excused her behaviour and inefficiency. He argued that the fact that she did not achieve much did not upset the electorate, because they did not expect anything in the first place (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11). A *Hindustan Times* article, published soon after her election, suggested that the electorate had no illusions about Shabnam, 'who has already acquired the trappings of power', that is, had herself become like other politicians. The article goes on to say: 'they claim it can't get any worse for them' (5 March 2000). The desire to act differently, as expressed by the public in the act of voting for an alternative candidate (instead of known, professional politicians), was evidently more significant than the fact that nothing would improve as a consequence of voting in this manner. As a voter quoted in the *Hindustan Times* article put it: 'We have never been able to get near politicians after elections, let alone get our work done through them. So what if Shabnam doesn't do anything for us? At least she's our candidate'. Shabnam represented something different and that was why she won the election, despite not being able to do the work required of her (Sharma Interview, 5/4/11) or being perceived as unable to do so.

The Shahdol MLA seat was reserved for a member of the Scheduled Caste in the following 2003 election, so Shabnam did not contest the seat. Shabnam said she would have run again if the seat were not reserved (Interview, 30/1/11). It is unlikely that she would have won a second time: even those who supported her initial campaign said that she would not win again, intimating that Shabnam was not viewed

⁴¹ Shabnam not only created trouble, she was also sometimes the victim of it during her time in office. During our interviews, she alluded to the fact that she had faced certain difficulties as a politician, attributing scars on her stomach and face to attacks whilst in office. Although Shabnam was physically attacked, it is unclear whether it was during this time. A local journalist who had supported her campaign stated that the scars had been the result of a former incident in Mumbai (where Shabnam lived until she was about sixteen) by the family of a man who had adopted and cared for her once she had left her natal home (Anonymous Interview 5/4/11).

⁴² The incident in the Bhopal Assembly was over the question of whether Anuppur should be moved to the Badra district. Bisahulal Singh, who was the MLA for the Anuppur seat of Shahdol district at the time, was in favour of moving the Block of Anuppur. This move would have removed the possibility of Anuppur becoming a district in its own right, which many local politicians and people in Anuppur supported. Shabnam Mausi confronted Bisahulal Singh over this issue after she had filed a no-confidence motion against him, which led to their scuffle.

⁴³ Surraiya Nāyak, a leader in the MP community, said that Shabnam's behaviour was 'improper, and nothing else'. Surraiya stated: 'it's not our job to dirty or abuse other persons; she should do good work in her constituency so the community's name is upheld. After all, she is an independent MLA and she should act according to that' (*NavBharat* 2001: 3).

as a 'successful' politician and that people, at least in Shahdol, would not give her a second chance. Unlike Kamla Jaan, Shabnam has stayed active in local politics in MP. In 2008, she contested the Kotma segment of Shahdol district in the Assembly Elections, on a Rashtriya Janata Dal⁴⁴ ticket, without success. She then unsuccessfully contested the 15th Lok Sabha Elections in 2009, hoping to win a Parliamentary Constituency seat from Khajuraho, in northern MP, as an independent candidate. In 2012, Shabnam contested the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections from Kanpur, under the banner of the Rashtriya Viklang Party. A local in Kanpur, quoted in the *Times of India*, said: 'not only gender-wise, Shabnam is different in other aspects also like intelligence and commitment to [the] masses. I would prefer her over other candidates' (Siddiqui 2012). However, this support for Shabnam failed to materialise into votes.

Following her time in office, Shabnam Mausui returned to Anuppur town, where she lived for over twenty years before the election. She extended her current house after she was elected as an MLA; it is a large property that contains a temple to Sai Baba, a popular saint among both Hindus and Muslims. She performs traditional work in town, but she lives a largely reclusive life away from the *kinnar* community in MP.

iii. *Kamla Bua, Mayor of Sagar City, December 2009*

Due to Kamla Bua's position as incumbent mayor, I had expected that meeting Kamla Bua would be difficult. However, an ex-Municipal Corporation Official in Jabalpur called her on my behalf and Kamla agreed that I could interview her. Our first meeting was at her house. Her secretary, Mr Hussain, took me on his motorbike up the winding lanes to the ward where Kamla lived, which is in a central area of the city. The entrance to the house is unsuspecting with only a concrete plaque bearing her name. We walked up a dark corridor and suddenly came across a large, open room, behind which is a large meeting hall. This was the main meeting hall for the *sammelan* described earlier, but at the time, there was construction work going on. Kamla was sitting on the floor of the open room, from which I could see into the other rooms on the corridor and the kitchen. She was surrounded by a few people to whom she was giving orders. It was obvious that Kamla was a powerful individual, due as much to her status in the *kinnar* community as it was to do with being the Mayor. Kamla had taken the morning off, since she had arrived home late from a trip the night before. She was an imposing figure, dressed all in white, with a towel round her shoulders to stop her wet hair dripping onto her clothes. Several people were present: a few men from the Municipal Corporation, a people men who worked in her house, a couple of other *kinnars* and girls who were walking in and out of the kitchen. Kamla explained that she had two

⁴⁴ A Bihar-based political party founded by Lalu Prasad Yadav.

celās, but also many adopted daughters and sons, who lived with her until she got them married. Most were children who had been abandoned by their parents so she wanted to raise them and give them a proper start in life.

We sat down on the floor and Mr Hussain motioned that we should begin so we did not waste time. We sat in a ragged circle and the room was quite dark. Kamla began speaking, before I had begun to ask questions, stating that she had entered politics in order to fight for *kinnars'* rights. She was very insistent on this point and showed me a letter from the Supreme Court in response to her petition asking them to give *kinnars* equal rights. We spoke about her campaign and time in office so far, including her joining the BJP six months into her tenure, and about her personal life. She said she had inherited the property from her *guru*, with whom she had come to live when she was very young. Kamla is the head *kinnar* of the community in Sagar and the nearby territories and has many *celās* in the district. She is wealthy and respected. During the interview Kamla summoned one of her daughters to comb her hair and tie it into a bun for her; she also called for and put on her gold jewellery. She obviously takes pride in her appearance, but is not vain. She was preparing for her day at the same time as our interview and we only stayed an hour. Mr Hussain later explained that as a new Mayor, with no prior experience of politics, she was still learning on the job, and that has counted against her as people have started to assess her tenure.

On later trips to Sagar, Mr Hussain and Mr Sanjay Kareer, an independent journalist, aided me in learning more about Kamla's election and tenure. I also learnt more about Kamla herself. I met with her again in a small chamber behind her mayoral chamber in the Municipal Corporation. Seven or so men were sitting in her office, so she showed Mr Kareer and I into the inner chamber behind the main office. We spoke about other topics, including her position in the community and her adopted children and *celās*; *kinnar* children; familial relationships among *kinnars*; *sammelans*; and caste. This interview was more relaxed and Kamla seemed to enjoy talking about issues with which she was more familiar, including explaining some aspects of *kinnar* society. At the end of the interview she invited me to accompany her to an upcoming *sammelan* in Bhopal. This interview allowed me to see another side to Kamla Bua, one where she was more comfortable in her dealings away from local politics.⁴⁵

Mr Hussain and Mr Kareer arranged numerous meetings with other journalists, individuals who worked at the Municipal Corporation, some interviews with local voters, and the advocate who was conducting the case against Kamla in the Sagar

⁴⁵ At a bi-monthly Municipal Corporation meeting, Kamla Bua was watching over the proceedings with other Municipal Corporation officials such as the President and Commissioner. Although she followed what was happening—mainly discussions, some of which turned into heated arguments, among corporators—Kamla did not get involved or speak much. This was in contrast to her role at the *sammelan*, where she constantly asserted herself and appeared comfortable in her surroundings.

District Court. As Mr Hussain became busier in the Corporation, Mr Kareer stepped in to help me arrange interviews and act as translator. He was always as engaged and fascinated by the research as much as I was. Many days we would sit and discuss the interviews or what had happened, or some issues that I was trying to think through. We had to be flexible in regards to interviews, with many conducted at night. One time I arrived in Sagar at 8pm, only to rush off to an interview an hour later with journalist Mr Sudesh Tiwari. This turned out to be one of the most productive interviews and it lasted until nearly midnight. When we met Mr Krishna Veer Singh Thakur, the attorney arguing the petition against Kamla Bua, we went to his home at 10pm at night, where he was still working. Mr Kareer arranged interviews with voters around the city, visiting people's homes or interviewing people on the street. I insisted on this although we eventually attracted such a large crowd it became impossible to focus and get the person being interviewed to respond.⁴⁶

My fieldwork experiences in Sagar were different from Anuppur and Shahdol and Katni since Kamla Bua was the incumbent mayor: people seemed to moderate their responses about her and an election that had happened less than two years earlier. I found this happened particularly in interviews with local voters, where they said they had no complaints with her tenure. On the other hand, other people were willing to point out in what ways they thought she had failed, particularly journalists or educated members of the public who did not see any physical change or developments in Sagar.

In December 2011 Kamla Bua's election was disqualified because she had run for a Scheduled Caste seat but did not have the correct documentation to prove her status.⁴⁷ She was unseated and although she initially filed a petition in the Jabalpur High Court against the verdict, she later dropped the case and a new BJP mayor, Aneeta Ahirwar, was sworn into office in April 2012. After Kamla's unseating, journalist Sanjay Kareer suggested that people in Sagar had lost interest in her, that they had 'discarded' her. Aneeta Ahirwar, he reckoned, was no different from previous politicians and so voters in Sagar found that things were 'back to where they were before' (Personal Correspondence, 13/6/13).

⁴⁶ While individuals were happy to be interviewed, the informal setting and short discussions soon turned the process into a spectacle in which other people wanted to take part by and give their opinion. Once one interviewee heard another interviewee's answer, they gave almost the same response. Even though Mr Kareer explained the nature of our research, he suggested that people suspected we might be working for a newspaper, or even Kamla Bua herself. These individuals were the most reluctant to comment on the state of government in Sagar or what they felt were the major problems. Everyone claimed they were happy with Kamla and would vote for her again.

⁴⁷ A caste certificate is required when the nomination is filed. However the Returning Officer did not ask Kamla for her caste certificate. In the caste box on the nomination form, Kamla wrote 'caste-less kinnar' (*jātivihīn kinnar*). Mr K.V.S. Thakur, the advocate for Suman Ahirwar, stated that she only filed for a caste certificate after the petition was brought against her.

Kamla's Campaign, Tenure, and Unseating

Kamla Bua's election was different from the other cases because she stated explicitly that she chose to run for office, in order to bring attention to and secure equal rights for *kinnars*. Despite the self-proclaimed intention to run on behalf of *kinnars*, Kamla generated mass support among local voters in the city. She won the directly elected mayoral seat with a margin of 43,433 votes. She ran as an independent candidate, whilst the majority of the corporators in the Municipal Corporation belonged to the BJP party. In June 2010, Kamla Bua joined the BJP party and her decision affected a change in the composition of the Mayor-in-Council to reflect the Mayor's party affiliation (that is, her largely independent council were replaced with members belonging to the BJP); interviewees said that the Corporation became more effective as a consequence, since the Mayor and the majority of the Corporation belonged to the same party and were thus able to make decisions affecting the Corporation more easily.⁴⁸

Like the other *kinnars* who became involved in politics, Kamla Bua had no background or experience of district level politics. In contrast to other *kinnars* who described that constituents urged them to contest elections, Kamla and others claim that it was her idea to campaign, perhaps inspired by the electoral success of other *kinnars*. She filed a petition with the Supreme Court asking them to recognise the need for equal rights for *kinnars*. This self-expressed reason was coupled with the desire to enter politics, as a citizen of India. Kamla expressed the sentiment that she should not just perform traditional work, given that she is a citizen and thus could enter other fields, such as the domain of politics (Interview, 2/2/11).

When Kamla began campaigning, the mood in Sagar was similar to other localities in which *kinnars* successfully contested elections. People were frustrated with local politicians and she took advantage of this sentiment, putting herself forward for the election. Kamla is a wealthy and influential *kinnar* and this position worked in her favour, saying she would work with the sole intention of developing the city, rather than making a profession out of politics. Her considerable wealth helped to present her as a suitable candidate, since, as she argued, she would not be corrupt and dishonest.

As with the other cases, Kamla's candidacy was viewed as a mockery of the BJP and Congress candidates. At the initial campaign stage, Kamla Bua walked through town informally, gathering supporters and local people interested in her campaign. Her marches were seen as light-hearted fun, with people 'trailing' behind them through the main streets of the city, mocking and laughing at the procession.⁴⁹ This

⁴⁸ In the 2009 election, 31 out of 48 wards were won by the BJP, meaning that Kamla's decision to join the party ensured a smoother running of the Corporation, given that the majority of councillors belonged to the BJP as well (Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11).

⁴⁹ Sagar journalist Sudesh Tiwari said that the campaign was not 'serious' in the sense that it was not organised. When *kinnars* walk on the streets, Mr Tiwari noted, people follow them, laughing, taunting, and mimicking their distinctive clap. During her campaign, Kamla would wander on the streets with other *kinnars*, and would generate a following of twenty or thirty

was probably because people were surprised to see a *kinnar* contesting the election, and Kamla Bua was seen as a 'regular' *kinnar*, who, up to this point, had had no interests or contribution to the development of Sagar (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11).⁵⁰ Kamla's marches generated interest in her candidacy and spread news of her election among constituents. She began to gain support, demonstrated in the production of electoral material by her supporters and donations to her campaign. In the later stages of the campaign, material was 'donated' to five or six prominent local newspapers in order to advertise Kamla's campaign (*ibid.*). These advertisements discussed her agenda and urged people to vote for the 'key', Kamla's campaign symbol.

From the outset, Kamla's support ostensibly came from lower-class people in Sagar. However, support was more widespread. Dilip Chanchal, a local printing merchant, stated that many people in town supported her candidacy, even though they would not support a *kinnar* publicly (Interview, 5/3/11). This latent support was reflected in the post-election public reaction: Kamla Bua took to the streets to celebrate, but it was a relatively small celebration, as her support was largely invisible. This lack of visible support contrasts the way in which other candidates were seen. Kamla organised public gatherings towards the end of the campaign, but few people would attend. On the other hand, the Chief Minister of the state, Shivraj Singh Chauhan, visited Sagar to campaign for the BJP, and twenty thousand people attended the rally, yet, the BJP candidate was unable to secure even that number of votes during the election. Prominent state leaders campaigned for the Congress candidate as well, but failed to convert crowd numbers into voting figures. People did not want to associate with Kamla explicitly but still wanted to vote for her.

Kamla Bua's election was not solely due to her perceived popularity with voters. Retrospectively, people commented that it was anger and disillusion with professional politicians that led to her victory (Chanchal Interview, 5/3/11; Tiwari Interview 28/2/11), akin to the situation in Katni and Shahdol. Anger with experienced politicians made her decision to run as an independent candidate significant. In previous mayoral elections, the people of Sagar had shown reluctance in voting for independent candidates, so an outright victory was not clear or expected (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11; Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11). However, as an independent candidate, Kamla was not tied to any mainstream political party agenda and therefore was more attractive to many voters. Interviewees said that they did not want to vote

people. The campaign seemed unorganised since Kamla would simply choose different parts of the city to go to on different days, knocking on doors to meet different people. Mr Tiwari said *kinnars* would engage in familiar banter with people, instead of engaging as a 'serious' candidate who came to ask for votes. Kamla did not ask directly for votes, but instead suggested improvements and developments she might make to Sagar; this informal approach endeared voters to her (Interview, 28/2/11).

⁵⁰ Usually individuals who wish to contest elections have a background in social work or development in their wards or cities. Kamla Bua had no background in such work in Sagar until she decided to contest the election.

for Congress or BJP and she provided a different option. Kamla had no party backing or political experience and thus she was represented as an individual who was devoid of party ideology. In fact, her independent status was occasionally explained as the most significant factor in her election. Rajesh Keshernwani, a local merchant, said that voters in Sagar knew that she would not have support from the government (both at the state and municipal level), nor financial aid, but what was important was that she represented 'something new', in standing as an independent and trying to implement, what he termed, a 'new ideology' (Interview, 5/3/11).

Different factions in both the BJP and Congress parties took advantage of Kamla's independent status and popularity. Once it was evident that Kamla might be a real threat to the other candidates, stories began to circulate by various local BJP and Congress factions to discredit nominated candidates that other factions did not support. Journalist Sudesh Tiwari explained that individual factions felt they might be able to damage the prospects of other candidates so they started supporting Kamla's campaign (Interview, 28/2/11). This involved undermining nominated candidates and actively supporting Kamla. Rumours were spread to galvanise support from a variety of social groups. Although Kamla Bua herself states she is from the Kori caste, which is a Scheduled Caste (Hussain Interview, 7/3/11), there were other rumours generated that she was a Brahmin (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11; Ahmed Interview, 27/2/11), or from a different caste altogether (Anonymous, 7/3/11). There were also rumours that she was a Muslim (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11) to gain support from Muslim constituents. Moreover, rumours were spread in order to gain wider support from different local factions of both Congress and BJP.⁵¹ As an example of 'internal sabotage' in the BJP, I was given the case of the factional conflict between Mr Bhupen Singh Dhakur and Mr Gopal Bhargav. Mr Sandhya Bhargav was the district president of the Bharatiya Janshakti Party (BJS)⁵² and supported Kamla's campaign to damage the BJP candidate's prospects. The rural development BJP minister of MP was Mr Gopal Bhargav, and he was from an adjoining constituency to Sagar. Since Sandhya Bhargav supported Kamla, his supporters tried to intimate that Gopal Bhargav also supported her candidacy. Kamla's supporters intended to undermine the BJP campaign by claiming that a BJP minister supported Kamla instead of the BJP candidate, Suman Ahirwar. Mrs Ahirwar was backed by Mr Bhupen Singh Dhakur, another prominent political leader and a member of parliament for Sagar constituency. Mr Dhakur and Mr

⁵¹ Local journalist Mr Tiwari said that factional conflicts among the Congress Party are well-known, and would have impacted whatever candidate the state-level Congress Party chose to nominate (as it turned out, in this election, the Congress candidate was not a 'serious' threat, as Mr Tiwari assessed; Interview, 28/2/11).

⁵² This was a party founded in 2006 by Uma Bharati, a former leader in the BJP. In 2011, the BJS party merged with the BJP when Uma Bharati rejoined her former party. In 2000, Uma Bharati indicated that the BJP was open to fielding *kinnars* in future elections (*Indian Express* 2000), and this statement might have given credence to her rumoured support in 2009 of Kamla Bua's candidacy.

Gopal Bhargav were from different factions in the BJP and it was assumed that each would attempt to sabotage the other's prospects. Thus, Mr Gopal Bhargav's apparent support for Kamla might have been believable, as manufactured by Sandhya Bhargav and the BJS. If the BJP candidate lost, it would damage Mr Dhakur's reputation (Mr Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11).

Kamla Bua's campaign was soon considered a threat to the other contenders, despite her independent status in a city where independent candidates rarely won elections, coupled with the fact she was a *kinnar*. Evidence that she was a threat can be demonstrated in the election itself. Before polling day, a candidate was nominated for the election with the name 'Kamla Bai Kinnar', who was also running as an independent candidate. Kamla's name appeared as 'Kamla Bua' on the voting form. This tactic was implemented to confuse voters and draw votes away from Kamla Bua. Despite such tricks, Kamla's victory seemed certain. Even after the first round of counting, Kamla secured a huge margin ahead of her rivals (Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11). Her impending victory worried experienced politicians in the Corporation, whose own elections had been confirmed several days earlier, since they knew it would be difficult working with a Mayor who did not belong to either Congress or BJP, parties that dominated the Corporation. There was worry about working with Kamla Bua, a *kinnar* who had no experience of politics and only a few years of formal education. The Sagar District Collector, Mr Manish Srivastava, commented on the reasons for Kamla's success, including what he perceived as a high voter turnout among women and a high voter turnout generally. He also mentioned that because she was 'bisexual', people thought she would have no ulterior motives to collect money (Interview, 1/2/11).

The first six months in office proved hard for Kamla Bua. The BJP held a majority in the Corporation with 31 of 48 ward councillors. As required of the Mayor, Kamla Bua formed an advisory council, the Mayor-in-Council. She did so with a smattering of independent councillors or councillors who belonged to smaller political parties, and a couple of Congress members who became independent candidates when she invited them to join the Council. This Council had little experience and no major party support, making progress slow initially in the Corporation.

After six months in office, Kamla Bua joined the BJP. This was an expedient move since she received political, financial, and emotional support in order to manage the Corporation more efficiently. Kamla Bua herself recognised the significance of such a move, which allowed her to work more positively towards the development of Sagar (Interview, 2/2/11). The BJP now had a majority in the Corporation and controlled the Mayor-in-Council, which was reformed to consist of experienced BJP members.⁵³

⁵³ Kamla joined the BJP in July 2010. The new Mayor-in-Council was sworn in on 25th August 2010.

Overall, this allowed for a more efficient running of the Corporation.⁵⁴ At the same time, Kamla had gained valuable experience from her initial six months in office (Hussain Interview, 3/3/11). Her experience added to an increase in her efficiency in the period after her first six months in office. Another factor regarding the Corporation's efficiency was the arrival of a new Commissioner in 2010. The Commissioner was in charge of the budget allocation and ensuring the state government released funds allocated to the district, as well as monitoring the functioning of the Corporation on a daily basis. The new Commissioner, S. B. Singh, ensured that the Sagar Corporation was no longer in deficit, allowing for funding for future projects.⁵⁵

However, Kamla's supporters and BJP members argue that her incorporation into the BJP ensured the smooth running of the Corporation, based on BJP members' experience, agenda, and vision. There was some criticism of Kamla Bua joining the BJP, based on the fact that she was voted for, in large part, because of her status as an independent candidate, and since she would have to adopt the BJP agenda and party interests.⁵⁶ However, joining the BJP made little difference to many constituents.⁵⁷ Many interviewees assumed that once she joined the BJP, her individual interests and actions were less significant, and that the BJP would work in the city's interests. Alternatively, her move makes little difference if people already assumed that her tenure would be unimportant and that joining a party would make little difference to what she could achieve. Journalist Sudesh Tiwari explained that people simply wanted to teach local politicians a lesson, so they did not expect that Kamla would be a more efficient or honest politician, contradicting campaign rhetoric regarding potential efficiency. Since they did not expect anything, Kamla did not disappoint them,

⁵⁴ One interviewee in the current Mayor-in-Council (MIC), Mr Naresh Yadav, noted that one reason for the efficient running of the Corporation was the receipt of funds from the MP government to the Municipal Corporation. When the state government is ruled by the same party as the Municipal Corporation in question (here, both BJP), the payment is made without delay. This was the case once Kamla Bua joined the BJP party, giving the BJP a mayor belonging to the party as well as the majority of wards in the Corporation. He also attributed the Corporation's success (after Kamla's incorporation into the party) to experienced politicians joining the MIC, rather than the relatively inexperienced 'independent' and smaller party representatives that had made up the MIC in the first six months of Kamla's tenure (Yadav Interview, 2/3/11).

⁵⁵ Financial constraints are a common problem for local government bodies in MP; see Palharya 2003 and Behar 2003.

⁵⁶ For example, Mr Keshewani, a local merchant, gave the opinion that her independent status is what caused so many people to support her campaign in the first place, so it was crucial that she stay as an independent and try to achieve something in office from this position. This was her 'moral duty', he said, and it didn't matter whether she succeeded or not. He argued that what made her supporters angry about her joining the BJP was that they had rejected the main political parties, including the BJP, and then she became a 'tool' of that very party. 'She is there', Mr Keshewani said, 'where we didn't want her to go' (Interview, 5/3/11).

⁵⁷ Several lower-class individuals I interviewed (who wanted to remain anonymous or only gave their first names) said that Kamla joining the BJP meant that she got economic and party support and could achieve more so they supported that move, or said that her move did not make any difference to them because they still supported her.

including joining the BJP (Interview, 28/2/11).⁵⁸ On the other hand, some people strongly criticised her move, arguing that it slowed development works in the Corporation. One non-BJP Corporation member stated that in the initial stages of her tenure, Kamla worked purely for the development of the city and the issues she thought were important. After she joined the BJP she could not act in this way since she could not make personal decisions anymore.⁵⁹ This was because she had pressure placed on her from her Mayor-in-Council members and BJP corporators to confirm to the BJP agenda and their individual interests. The interviewee said that they placed too much pressure on Kamla, occasionally leading to inactivity due to a power struggle between these leaders and the Mayor. Thus, development work lost its momentum (Anonymous Interview, 3/3/11).

There is one further aspect regarding Kamla's incorporation into the BJP. After the election, the defeated BJP candidate, Suman Ahirwar, and her husband filed a petition in the Sagar District Court. The petitioners raised questions over Kamla's caste status since, as they argued, she failed to provide adequate certification proving her Scheduled Caste status. Despite joining the BJP, the petition was not dropped. It might have mattered little to the BJP who the mayor of Sagar was—Kamla Bua or the instated Suman Ahirwar—but Kamla's supporters were disappointed that joining the BJP did not result in the petition being dropped, nor did it affect the outcome of this petition.⁶⁰

The Sagar Mayoral seat is always reserved for Scheduled Caste individuals; on this occasion the seat was reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman. The petition stated that Kamla Bua had failed to prove that she was a member of the Scheduled Castes, which was a constitutional requirement in applying for reserved political office. The lawyer for the petitioner, Mr K. V. S. Thakur, argued that Kamla had failed to prove her status to the Returning Election Officer when she submitted her nomination and that it was her duty to provide a caste certificate. Caste documentation is required by the Election Officer when the nomination is submitted.⁶¹ Moreover, there was an

⁵⁸ Mr Tiwari went on to say that individuals knew that they did not have a good option in Kamla Bua and that she would also 'fail'. Their desire to punish the other candidates was so great that they simply chose her as an alternative (Interview, 28/2/11).

⁵⁹ Joining the BJP affected those who had helped her to campaign and given her advice in the initial months in office, perhaps helping form her initial agenda. Like Kamla Jaan in Katni, Kamla Bua had a group of supporters and advisors who placed her in office and supported her after the election. Upon her induction into the BJP, these supporters were forced to leave Kamla, and this may have affected her political vision.

⁶⁰ Discussions with non-BJP Corporation members raised the issue that MP state Ministers and the BJP government did not take Kamla Bua's membership of the party seriously, which is why she was not supported regarding the petition brought against her. One aide in the Corporation noted that the committee of the state government had accepted her, but not the Delhi Committee at the National Level. As a result, many important members in the BJP did not accept her, even at a local level, and give her the support she deserved as a party member.

⁶¹ At the same time the petition was filed against Kamla Bua, there was a media storm about whether a different case would be filed against the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) Officer who was as the Returning Election Officer, Rajesh Kaul. Mr Kaul failed to ask Kamla Bua to provide a caste certificate, and Mr Thakur stated that Mr Kaul should be reprimanded for neglect of duty. He noted that once the petition against Kamla was finished in court, the court

‘unrecognisable’ description of her caste status on her nomination form: I use the word ‘unrecognisable’ because Kamla Bua did clearly identify what she saw as her caste status, as she understood it, even though her caste status was not recognised—by the judiciary and the petitioners—as within the reserved category for this particular seat (Scheduled Caste). In our interview, Mr Thakur, at this point, stated clearly, in his own words, that ‘there was no mention of caste on her form’, even though she did fill in the box. However, she did so without reference to intelligible categories. The caste box options were: Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Class. She wrote in the column ‘*jātivihīn kinnar*’, which translates as ‘caste-less *kinnar*’. Mr Thakur argued that two documents prove that she does not have Scheduled Caste status. First, on a passport application, made about ten years previously, Kamla wrote that she was born in Hoshangabad district in MP, but there was no mention of her caste. Second, on her caste certificate application, filed after this petition was brought against her, she wrote that she was of the Kori Caste and born in Sagar.⁶² Evidently she cannot be from both places and this was the main argument brought against her in the petition (Thakur Interview, 11/7/11). Mr Thakur’s argument was supported by the judiciary, who ruled that Kamla’s election was void on the grounds that she failed to prove her caste status. Her attempt to declare her ‘castelessness’ was not viewed with sympathy, with the court focusing on the fact that she had not proved her actual caste status; here, that would mean proving membership of a Scheduled Caste. They did not consider how her self-declaration of ‘castelessness’ might give a subject the same status as membership of a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, or Other Backward Class might. Mr Thakur argued that ‘there was no mention of caste on her form’, revealing that her declaration of her castelessness was unintelligible to pre-understood categories of caste belonging, in reference to electoral reservations. Thus her desire to transcend caste categories, reflected by Kamla Bua’s statement during an interview that *kinnars* should be allowed to choose their own caste, was not simply accepted by the state court, raising questions about the potential of caste-transcending discourse, particularly when produced by lower-caste or –status subjects, such as in the case of Kamla Bua.⁶³

could ask the IAS to penalise him. Mr Thakur also said that the Election Commission should be more diligent in their work, since such cases are not uncommon in the courts regarding failure to provide adequate proof for reserved seats.

⁶² An application must be made to the Subcollector of the District Revenue Department, the *tahsildār*, to obtain a caste certificate. Kamla Bua applied for a new caste certificate since she did not have the original. Her application was made after the petition was filed against her. Mr Thakur speculated it was extremely unlikely that a Scheduled Caste person would not have a certificate since it was necessary in order to get benefits allotted to Scheduled Caste persons. However, not having a certificate may not be uncommon among *kinnars* who are born to Scheduled Caste families and then join the *kinnar* community at a young age. For a late application, six witnesses must give evidence to verify the caste of the individual.

⁶³ I return to this discussion in chapter five in the comparative discussion of Kamla Bua and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, suggesting that a discourse regarding castelessness might look different according to the caste and social status of the subject employing such rhetoric.

The case was brought to the Sagar District Court in early 2010, and Kamla Bua made several appeals to higher courts (both local and state), which seemed primarily to delay proceedings. The case was completed and verdict given in December 2011. Kamla Bua was unseated for contesting a Scheduled Caste seat without documentation to prove her scheduled caste status. Kamla Bua made an appeal to the High Court in Jabalpur but withdrew the petition in mid-2012, relinquishing her claim to the mayoral seat, due to both political pressure and personal issues. Kamla was dejected that the mass support she received was disregarded by the court's verdict, but decided to contest the MLA election in December 2013 (Interview, 28/8/13).⁶⁴

IV. The Question of Representation

The case studies discussed above offer a detailed consideration of the three elections of Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, and this approach provides material for a comparative discussion of three elections of *kinnars* in eastern MP. Certain similarities are evident, such as the way in which *kinnar* identity was presented in order to suggest that each of the *kinnars* would make a suitable, alternative representative to mainstream politicians and the ways campaigns were organised and run. At the same time, important differences have been revealed. Kamla Jaan and Shabnam Mausi's elections are more similar, particularly because both were encouraged to run by constituents, so that their campaigns were focused on issues relating to their own communities, with their 'agendas' shaped by voters' demands. In comparison, Kamla Bua's decision to contend the Sagar election focused—at least in part—on issues relating to *kinnars*, even if these issues became subsumed within a wider political position, in order to attract more supporters for her candidacy. A difference in personality is also evident: Kamla Jaan's more demure role and personality provides a comparison to Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua's more forceful temperaments. Kamla Bua, in turn, appears as more imposing than Shabnam Mausi, which may be due, to an extent, upon her status within the *kinnar* community in MP and within Sagar. This compares with Shabnam's relative lack of influence, due to her location outside of mainstream *kinnar* society and as based in the small town of Anuppur. The roles each play, after their elections, also can be compared. The prominence of Shabnam Mausi's position as an MLA, coupled with her lack of prior political experience and party support, might have hindered the role she played, such that she was sidelined within assembly debate and action. In contrast, Kamla Jaan and Kamla Bua's positions as local mayors may have allowed them to take a more active role in these comparatively

⁶⁴ Interestingly, Kamla suggested she would contest Naryaoli Constituency (38) seat in Sagar district, which was reserved for a Scheduled Caste person. She did not contest the seat however; the winner was the sitting MLA and former Sagar mayor, Pradeep Lariya (BJP).

smaller, local forums. Moreover, the mayoral role posited them as working within and in charge of that particular forum, unlike Shabnam's position as one of many representatives from across MP state.

Despite clear differences, these case studies reveal similarities in the way *kinnars* were established as political candidates, impacting upon how *kinnar* identity was being reconfigured through local political discourse. In all three cases, *kinnars* were presented as an alternative choice to professional politicians in similar ways. Each *kinnar* was represented as an independent candidate who was not linked to parties or their agendas and who embodied specific characteristics that voters desired in their politicians, such as incorruptibility and dedication to their constituents. This issue of representation is what I turn to in the following chapter, widening and framing *kinnar* representation within a discussion of the representation of marginalised groups in democratic politics. The *hijra* or *kinnar* community is not recognised in current affirmative action policies as a group that should be afforded particular protections and opportunities due to their marginal status, and I explore *kinnar* political participation in relation to the representation of minority groups in democratic bodies. Relating to the specific cases for this thesis, I explore how *kinnars* were represented as suitable candidates, focusing on the presentation of specific aspects of their identity in campaign rhetoric in order to present them as appealing candidates to voters in Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar. While *kinnars* were represented as likely and able to serve their constituents, there were limitations to what they could achieve in office and the extent to which they were 'representative' of their constituents.

Chapter Three

Representation and Rhetoric: Constructing Kinnar 'Political' Identity

The successful contestation of elections by *kinnars* in MP raises questions regarding the possibility of representation for previously unrecognised marginalised groups in deliberative and legislative bodies. In the first half of this chapter, I explore theories of liberal democracy that justify representation for marginalised social groups in political institutions, questioning the potential for *kinnars*, as a marginalised group, to be included in current preferential policy schemes. I then analyse how various aspects of *kinnar* identity were re-constructed as a result of their political participation, notably through campaign rhetoric that sought to establish them as suitable and appealing alternatives to professional politicians. This discussion leads to a second question: the extent to which extent *kinnars* were representative of their constituents.

I begin by attending to the issue of representation of marginalised groups within political institutions.¹ I consider why group representation is necessary in order to ensure a fairer system of democratic participation, focusing on the justification for the inclusion of marginalised groups within deliberative and legislative forums. I assess the benefits and pitfalls associated with the inclusion of marginalised or subordinate groups, particularly in relation to preferential policies² in India, including the creation of a 'creamy layer' of beneficiaries, the limits of caste-based criteria for beneficiaries, and a solidification of caste identities. I then consider the current reservation systems within *Pañcāyati Rāj* Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies, questioning the potential for marginal groups to benefit from affirmative action schemes in local, political institutions. While *kinnars* do not currently benefit from preferential policies as a group, although two of the three individuals discussed in the case studies did benefit from reservation policies (for seats reserved for women and Scheduled Castes), I explore arguments that might be made for their inclusion in terms of group recognition. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse how *kinnars* were represented as a result of their political participation, focusing on the manipulation of stereotypical aspects of *kinnar* identity in the political sphere primarily through

¹ I adopt the description of the term 'marginalised group' as used by Melissa S. Williams (1998: 15-16) who distinguishes marginalised groups from other groups in relation to their specific representation in political bodies. She explains 'marginalised ascriptive groups' as having four characteristic features: (1) group members experience patterns of social and political inequality; (2) membership of the group is not voluntary; (3) membership is not usually experienced as mutable; (4) generally, the group identity is assigned negative meanings by the broader society or dominant culture.

² I use the term 'preferential policy' to refer to compensatory schemes instituted by the Indian government aimed at redressing inequalities faced by certain caste and class groups, which Sowell defines as 'government-mandated preferential policies towards government designated groups' (1990: 13). I also use the term 'affirmative action' which is commonly used in the Indian context, and 'reservation', which refers specifically to caste quotas mandated within democratic institutions.

campaign rhetoric. This re-presentation of *kinnar* identity was instrumental in solidifying a new form of *kinnar* identity, which adopted and adapted stereotypical *kinnar* characteristics in order to demonstrate that *kinnars* were viable candidates for public office. I argue that representation is inherently linked to the production of reality—I use the term ‘reality’ to point to the actual re-construction of *kinnar* identity as a result of a re-presentation—through a discussion of the concrete forms in which representation occurs. Both campaigners and *kinnars* highlighted particular aspects of *kinnar* identity, such as lacking membership of kinship and familial networks, heteronormative gender roles, and caste and religious identity, to represent *kinnars* as more honest candidates and in order to appeal potentially to a cross-section of society and draw from a wider base of political support. I then assess the relationship that was developed between *kinnars* and their constituents and explore the extent to which *kinnars* were ‘representative’, arguing that *kinnars* were not able to fill normative roles as representatives. A double representation thus occurred, where the traits that maintained their exclusion from normative social structures were harnessed to make them viable political candidates, at the very moment that *kinnars* sought to be included in mainstream society through political participation. Their identity was manipulated to embody the characteristics that voters wanted in their politicians, however, the stereotypes about *kinnars* that were used primarily to represent them as politicians only served to reify the marginal status of their identity. I therefore explore the ways in which rhetoric affected the production of *kinnar* identity, with the result that *kinnar* identity was (re)produced in negative terms within the political sphere.

I. What Is ‘Representation’?

In *The Concept of Representation* (1972), Hanna Pitkin offers a theorisation of the term ‘representation’, arguing that it has come to be linked with ‘popular representation’, associated with the notions of self-government and representative democracy. She focuses on one definition in which representation, taken generally, means ‘the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless, *not* present literally or in fact’ (8-9). Representation therefore makes present that which is not there, standing in for what is absent, such as representatives stand in for their absent constituents in the political arena. Pitkin’s conventional definition, while useful in relation to the notion of representation as political proxy, can be supplemented by the more profound theorisations on the concept of representation offered by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak focuses on the representation of subaltern groups, attending to the possibility of and means for representation, alongside the contradictions and dangers that are produced through the practice of representation. Spivak questions modes of critical self-representation through which ‘fractured voices’ simultaneously speaking ‘for and

as cannot double back to address the gaps occasioned by the omissions produced because of such self conscious practices of representation' (Ray 2009: 8). The position of speaking 'for' and 'as' is produced through the shifting distinction between two related but irreducibly discontinuous forms of representation. Spivak distinguishes between representation, on the one hand, as 'speaking for' (*vertretung*), which is akin to political representation, and, on the other, 'speaking as' (*darstellung*), which she defines as 'placing there' so that one thing represents another, such as in the sense of a portrait (1990: 108). She points to the difficulties in representation since the person who represents 'is always a multiplicity', yet will represent their position 'as transparent', usually singular or at the very least homogeneous, in the act of representing (2000: 1432). Moreover, in the act of representing politically, she notes that a representative actually represents both herself and her constituency in the portrait sense as well; no one simply 'speaks for' in a political sense (1990: 109). Spivak's theorisations complicate *kinnars'* political participation, such that *kinnars* represented their (absent) constituents, speaking 'for' in the sense of political proxy, and at the same time, were speaking 'as', re-presented (both by the public and themselves) as candidates who would better serve their constituencies due to their very identities as *kinnars*, an identity which excluded them from normative social networks. In what follows, I use the term 're-present' to recall Spivak's double sense of representation, alluding to the second sense of 'representation' as speaking 'as', in contrast to 'representation', which I use to allude to 'speaking for' as political proxy.

I use Spivak's theorisations to discuss *kinnars'* political participation, in which *kinnars* simultaneously speak for and as in the act of representation. In relation to my analysis of the second definition of representation, speaking 'as', I employ, in addition, the theorisations of Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (2002), who addresses the way in which language constructs meaning. I use Hall to supplement my theorisation of the re-presentation of *kinnars* through political practice, given Hall's discussion of concrete methods by which to theorise the way in which representation functions in everyday practice. His discursive approach, focusing on the historical specificity of a particular regime of representation and the specific forms in which representation occurs, is an important method which develops how representational practices operate in concrete situations, and I employ this approach in my later discussion of the impact of rhetoric on *kinnar* identity.

Spivak's theorisation of the double sense of 'representation', in which the subject speaks for and as in the act of representation, elicits an understanding of the subject as processually bringing their identity into being through repeated acts. This notion recalls the work of Judith Butler and the performance of gender identity (1990, 1993). Butler argues that the subject is brought into being through reiterated performance of norms, such that the subject appears naturalised. Spivak's arguments

regarding the practices of representation work well with a theorisation that focuses on the performance of identity through repeated acts and gestures. Throughout the discussion that follows, particularly pertaining to the construction of a form of *kinnar* political identity through re-presentation, it is evident that *kinnar* identity was brought into being through the repetition of narratives and the performance of their identities. These practices rendered their identity as *kinnars* legible within the fields of local politics, mirroring both Spivak and Butler's conclusions regarding, respectively, the practices of representation and subalternity and the performance of identity and legibility.

I return to Spivak's theorisation of representation to foreground the main conclusion for this chapter. One of her main concerns is the way in which representation of the subaltern is contradictory since it renders the subject no longer subaltern, and I use her arguments to frame my conclusions concerning the remarginalisation of *kinnar* identity. In 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', Spivak points to the way in which the project to establish a 'subaltern consciousness' presumes 'it will lead to a firm ground, to some *thing* that can be disclosed' (1985: 338). The subject of the subaltern consciousness is, in fact, the 'subaltern subject-effect': the effect of an operating subject from the different knottings and configurations of an 'immense discontinuous network' of strands, such as might be termed politics, ideology, history, sexuality, and so on (*ibid.*: 341). However, against the grain of the subaltern project—the retrieval of the subaltern subject through deconstructive historiography (1990: 131)—Spivak suggests that Subaltern Studies' own subalternity ('in claiming a positive subject-position for the subaltern') might be reinscribed as a strategy, acknowledging that the subaltern's:

persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in *his* efforts of this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic.

(1985: 345-6)

Spivak is concerned with the process of 'seeing ourselves as namers of the subaltern' (1990: 158) and the effects of the act of representation. It is the non-narrativisable nature of the subaltern that makes subjects subaltern, since their very acts cannot be framed within modes of interpretation (1990: 144). Representation thus renders the subaltern 'narrativisable' and intelligible, such that the subaltern ceases to exist.³ As she states, 'if

³ Historical processes of naming the subaltern have occurred throughout Indian history; during the colonial era, such processes were part of a project of state building, in terms of documenting, legitimating, classifying, and bounding subjects, institutions, and territory (see Cohn 1996: 3-4). Cohn's theorises particular ways in which British officials described and classified historical, natural, and social aspects of its most important colony, India, which include the 'survey modality', 'enumerative modality', and 'surveillance modality'. Of particular interest in the task of 'naming' is the series of censuses undertaken, representing, as

the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore' (*ibid.*: 158). In a similar way, representation for *kinnars* rendered their identity intelligible within mainstream politics, drawing upon aspects of their identity that kept *kinnars* marginal in society. *Kinnars'* marginality—as subaltern's 'subalternity'—was named and rendered intelligible within political discourse, making that marginalisation as central to *kinnar* identity and ceasing to recognise the heterogeneous forms—that is, the non-narrativisable aspects—of *kinnar* identity outside a specific political form.

II. Group Representation: Arguments for, and Problems with Identifying Beneficiaries

i. 'Fair Representation' and Preferential Policies

I turn to address the definition of representation as 'speaking for', asking how and why subordinate groups should be represented in legislative and deliberative bodies. Liberal democracies adhere to the dictum that individuals should be represented 'equally', most commonly through representative democracy where elected individuals speak for, or on behalf of, their constituents. Melissa S. Williams, in *Voice, Trust, Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (1998), argues that liberal representation rests on notions of individual equality and individual autonomy. The theory of liberal representation is based upon 'pure procedural justice', as described by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), in which justice does not have any criteria for what constitutes a just outcome, but is marked by a fair procedure. This fair procedure ensures that individuals are treated impartially at every stage; outcomes are

Cohn writes, 'a model of the Victorian encyclopedic quest for knowledge' (*ibid.*: 8). Social categories were created, Cohn argues, by which India could be organised administratively; such categories, however, objectified linguistic, cultural, and social differences. The surveillance modality functioned to point out subjects who remained outside the boundaries of civil society and special instrumentalities were designed to control such groups, who were stigmatised as criminal; the Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs Act of 1897 is an example of such a practice, in which 'eunuchs' were named and their practices criminalised. Naming was part of the process by which 'subalternity' was made intelligible. Partha Chatterjee, discussing anti-colonial nationalist projects (in reference to subaltern studies' projects that sought to separate the domains of 'elite' and 'subaltern' projects), points to the presence of subaltern politics within the elite domain itself, over which the elite must dominate, alongside negotiation to produce consent (1993: 12-13). However, he notes, the domain of subaltern politics has 'increasingly become familiar with, and even adapted itself to, the institutional forms characteristic of the elite domain': both are mutually constituted and, more importantly, the subaltern domain has rendered itself intelligible, in the terms of the discourse which the elite domain can understand, reflecting Spivak's argument that narrativisability renders the subject subaltern no more (1990: 158). More recent 'State' projects to name different social groups, for example, through reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes (for a history, see McMillan 2005), and recent government initiatives to name 'transgenders' (see Dutta 2012b in reference to the distinction made between MSM and TG identities), might also be interpreted as part of such processes of naming and rendering subjects intelligible and thus controllable.

perceived as fair since the procedure is 'fair' (Williams 1998: 9). The first strand of liberal representation is the principle of 'one person, one vote'; outcomes are considered fair because every individual has an equally weighted vote. The second strand is 'interest-group pluralism': every citizen has an equal opportunity to organise with other citizens in order to support certain candidates or form interest groups to translate into legislative policies (1998: 10). Williams notes that both strands describe 'slightly different standards of fairness' in relation to political representation: the former produces a standard of 'equal' representation, based on the equally weighted vote, but the latter strand does not ensure every citizen will be equally satisfied since only majority interests are translated into legislative policies. Thus the latter procedure yields a standard of 'equitable' representation, which refers to a fair method of cumulating citizens' interests.

An alternative to 'liberal representation' is the theory of 'fair representation'. 'Fair representation' justifies the representation of marginalised groups in political institutions, based on the recognition that marginalised groups remain under-represented in or invisible from deliberative and legislative bodies, thus their interests are ignored or unrecognised. The theory of 'fair representation' adheres to the first principle of liberal representation, that every individual is deemed equal by the principal of the equally weighted vote. However it denies the second principle, through which majority interests dominate and influence legislative policies that preserve those interests. Fair representation recognises that a 'fair' model of cumulating interests should not always ensure that legislation is produced through majority support, especially if it is harmful or damaging to minority groups and their interests.

The notion of fair representation provides a justification for policies that attempt to bring marginalised groups and minority interests into deliberative and legislative bodies, such as preferential policies. The liberal dictum, 'one person, one vote' presupposes that all individuals have equal opportunities and resources. Yet the notion of 'one vote' presupposes that voting is the measure of democracy, where all votes count equally or should have equal weight. Many groups in various societies are disadvantaged in relation to the majority and are arguably in need of state assistance. Therefore, arguments for group rights should be assessed in relation to liberal theories of rights. Williams advocates this approach, writing that 'although a group-based theory of fair representation reaches beyond liberal representation, the theory itself is not only compatible with but indeed is required by liberalism's core commitments to individual equality and individual autonomy' (1998: 15). Relating to Williams' discussion of 'equitable' representation as a way of considering the interests of the whole electorate, certain groups might be unrecognised or marginalised within an electorate and thus a theory of group-based fair representation is preferable to a theory

of liberal representation and is not incompatible with liberalism's key tenets. Will Kymlicka offers an argument that makes the interests of marginalised groups compatible with liberal commitments in *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (1989). He asserts that a conception of justice that takes into consideration the differences and discrepancies between the majority of a culture and its minorities cannot uphold uniform rights for all its citizens. Rather, collective rights are required for minority cultures to thrive. Williams notes that what is innovative about Kymlicka's approach is the insight that collective rights might be read as compatible with the 'duties' that societies owe to individuals (1995: 75).⁴ Elsewhere, she argues that a commitment to democratic equality carries with it 'a commitment to take seriously citizens' persistent sense of injustice, to attempt to understand the nature of the equality to which they lay claim' (1998: 12). In relation to political participation as a collective right, Charles Beitz sets forth a version of procedural theory that ensures the fair political participation of all citizens. He writes that the application of procedures that ensure equal political participation can make institutions more egalitarian, in recognising each person's status as an equal citizen, alongside being justifiable to each of their members (1989: 99). In assessing arrangements for participation, Beitz argues that in a system of complex proceduralism (in which institutions adhere to both substantive and procedural conceptions of fairness), factors such as recognition, equitable treatment, and deliberative responsibility should be taken into account (*ibid.*: 100); these factors are enhanced under systems that are more inclusive. Alastair McMillan, writing on the formation and development of reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, adopts this argument, stating that systems which exclude members of groups who have an identity distinct from those represented in the legislature could be said to undermine both the legitimacy and effectiveness of a truly 'representative' system. Referring to Beitz, he notes that a representative system should strive for equal recognition and equitable treatment, as well as encourage deliberation and implement special measures for politically underrepresented groups (2005: 94).

Certain group identities make participation, or even recognition, in a political process more difficult. Kymlicka notes that group representation rights are often defended in response to various systematic disadvantages that make effective group representation impossible. Rights for marginalised groups are important because, Kymlicka suggests, 'the historical domination of some groups by other groups has left a trail of barriers and prejudices that makes it more difficult for some historically

⁴ Kymlicka's claim for the recognition of cultural membership within a liberal conception of justice is based upon his on the argument that membership of a cultural group is essential for individual agency (Williams 1995: 75). Kymlicka argues that membership of a cultural community is essential since it gives different ways of life meaning and defines what is 'good' (1989: 163-5) and can be regarded as a primary good in the Rawlsian sense, since a loss of self-respect would be avoided in the original position (1989: 166). Cultural membership is thus a primary good, the 'consideration of which is an important part of showing equal concern for individuals' (*ibid.*).

disadvantaged groups to participate effectively in the political process' (1995: 141). Disadvantaged groups further suffer from unequal access to resources that the tenet of 'equal opportunity' might assume (Williams 1998: 60). For Williams, knowledge of historical discrimination is significant in considering whether marginal groups ought to benefit from group representation in legislative bodies. Groups that merit representation are characterised by two attributes: contemporary inequality compared to other social groups and a history of discrimination and oppression (*ibid.*: 176). A marginalised group might be reluctant or feel unable to enter institutions that purport to recognise them, since the experience of discrimination damages the trust between marginalised groups and the rest of society. While Williams warns against making explicit connections between past discrimination and current inequalities in status and resources, she acknowledges that certain groups are marginalised in current societies, a marginalisation compounded by what she terms a 'temporary injustice': the underrepresentation of historically marginalised groups in politics (*ibid.*: 177). Any government or institution interested in removing inequalities among individuals must address the question of historical discrimination. As Williams writes,

Difference-blind equality assumes that so long as no attention is paid to social difference, it will have no effect...[and] we will never overcome the inequalities that difference has been used to justify. Inequality that follows the lines of social difference means, perhaps paradoxically, that difference can only stop mattering when we have effectively addressed the deep and subtle ways in which it does matter.

(1998: 238-9)

Williams states that the domain of her argument is limited to American constitutional democracy, but hopes to contribute to broader debates on claims for special recognition among marginalised groups. Her central claims are that a group's distinctive experience provides a unique perspective that is relevant for collective decisions; that citizens' capacity to trust may be compromised by historical domination and betrayal, while this very trust is a component of democratic legitimacy; and that the history of a group's experience is relevant to moral judgments about its claims against the rest of society (1998: 22).

While these are important arguments regarding the political inclusion of marginalised groups, there are considerable issues with the practice of group representation that should be considered. Anne Phillips writes that representation by political proxy comes in two forms: either organisations (and by extension, individuals) reflect the different identities and groups into which people divide, or by proportional representation of their constituents' ideas and opinions (1991: 136). Representation relating to the political proxy definition thus attends to identities or ideas. Indian democracy has an indirect system, where representatives are chosen to make decisions on constituents' behalf, and has a multi-party system where a multitude of parties

represent different regions and communities. 'Descriptive' representatives tend to reflect the different identities and groups into which people divide,⁵ mirroring 'some of the more frequent experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to [a] group' (Mansbridge 1999: 628). Representatives and constituents share either the same or similar identifications, for example, race or gender, or the same or similar experiences, making the representative's opinions, ideas, and interests, akin to those of the group. Descriptive representation assumes that membership of the group ensures loyalty to the group above all else: "'being one of us" is assumed to promote loyalty to "our" interests' (*ibid.*: 629). Mansbridge argues that the deliberative function of democracy is improved through the contingent promotion of descriptive representation to ensure that the presence of a variety of voices and interests.⁶ Deliberation produces policies that benefit the polity as a whole, transforming interests that are good for the whole polity and creating commonality.⁷ The inclusion of multiple groups is necessary and disadvantaged groups may prefer or benefit from descriptive representation. Mansbridge thus argues that descriptive representation is useful in (at least) four contexts and advocates policies that promote descriptive representation in these contexts. They are contexts of mistrust; contexts of uncrystallised or not fully articulated interests; when ability to rule has been seriously questioned or unrecognised in historical contexts so that creating 'ability to rule' is important; and in order to increase a polity's *de facto* legitimacy in a context of past discrimination (1999: 628).⁸ There are practical issues, however, regarding the inclusion of minority groups into legislative and deliberative forums and I outline four key problems below: essentialism, accountability, legislative marginalisation, and 'Balkanisation'.

⁵ In the Indian context, Jodhka notes that the experience of participating in electoral politics in India has been translated as equality between caste groups instead of between caste-less individuals. While evidence points to a positive relationship between caste and voting behaviour, caste and religious communities do not vote in for a single political formation: other structural variables such as class and urban-rural difference matter (2010: 164). See Galanter 1997, Kothari 1997, Shah 2002.

⁶ Mansbridge argues that the essentialist features of descriptive representation can be mitigated by acknowledging the contingent reason for selecting certain groups, that is, the benefits of descriptive representation (see 1999: 654). She emphasises historical contexts and focuses on contexts in which descriptive representation advances the substantive representation of subordinate interests. She advocates that any institutionalisation of the concept 'descriptive representation' is best kept fluid (652) in order to avoid essentialism (such as would be institutionalised through permanent quotas).

⁷ The deliberative function of representative democracy aims at instituting policies that are good for the whole polity when group interests conflict; in contrast, the aggregative function of democracy produces a legitimate decision in the context of fundamentally conflicting interests (Mansbridge 1999: 634).

⁸ In the first two functions, descriptive representation enhances the substantive representation of groups' interests by improving deliberation, in which representatives are better able to represent interests, and thus perspectives, than nondescriptive representatives in deliberation (635). In the second two functions, descriptive representation promotes goods unrelated to substantive representation (that is, the tendency to advocate for certain groups), particularly the symbolic effect of such representation (although this does not ensure 'better', substantive representation necessarily) (648).

First, is the problem of 'group essentialism'. The implication that members of some groups share an identity of distinct interests or concerns implies that in a system of 'fair representation' (based on group representation and interests), these groups should have legislative presence. However, individuals belong to a variety of groups with whom they identify at different times: Phillips questions how far commonality should be extended as a key component of representation (1991: 152). She writes that representatives should mirror societal composition and mechanisms should ensure this rather than blindly follow essentialist criteria (*ibid.*: 156), although representatives should not only be viewed as representing their own ethnic group or sex. However, in regards to ensuring representation for marginalised groups, Williams argues that what members of these groups share is 'the experience of marginalization and the distinctive *perspective* on matters of public policy that comes of that experience' (1998: 6).

Second, is the problem of 'accountability'. Williams writes that it would be absurd to claim, for example, that a representative, simply because she is a woman, could and would represent the interests and perspectives of women generally: the mere presence of marginalised group representatives is not sufficient for the fair representation of citizens from those groups (1998: 6). Assertions of shared interests or identifications deny diversity within a group, as well as individual agency. There is a danger, therefore, in assuming that members of a group can speak for other members, and worse still, the descriptive characteristics of a representative might mislead the voter into thinking that their interests are represented, when this may not be the case (Mansbridge 1999: 39-40). Mechanisms should be identified to ensure representatives are accountable to constituents (such as through electoral connections or technological innovations to strengthen accountability).

A third issue is legislative marginalisation. Group marginalisation might be reproduced through deliberation and at the level of the legislature (Williams 1998: 7). An example of this might be recognised in the functioning of decentralised government bodies in India, where caste, class, and gender disadvantages are sometimes translated into local political bodies. *Grām sabhās* in MP require full village participation, but often reproduce class and caste distinctions with the result that previously marginalised groups, such as women and minorities, are less likely to assert themselves in participatory settings (Sisodia 2007; Kulkarni 2012: 155-9). Marginalised groups may have a history that possibly includes less education and a lack of resources through which to develop argumentative skills needed for deliberative politics, such that they have less power in public discourses than privileged group members or will be unable to formulate their opinions (see Williams 1995: 82). Thus, group marginalisation can be reproduced in democratic bodies, despite the assumption that forums such as *grām sabhās* allow for participation on an equal footing. Aside from

issues with participation, Williams acknowledges that minorities might be consistently outvoted and that internal diversity might hinder legislative solidarity (1998: 7).⁹

A final issue regarding the representation of minority groups is group proliferation or 'Balkanization'. This is the risk that social groups are given incentives to identify as marginalised in order to secure benefits. While a history of inequality should be a compelling reason for identifying certain groups for preferential treatment (Williams 1998: 8), there are difficulties in identifying which groups should benefit from redistributive schemes. In the Indian context, the application of preferential policies has created a context in which different groups vie to be considered as 'backward'. Further demands are put on the State (and individual states) to recognise more groups' marginal status and extend quotas. Defences of group-based conceptions of fair representation must identify which groups have a claim to representation or benefits and be able to distinguish the strength of different claims (*ibid.*: 7). Distinguishing which claims are valid is an issue with the current implementation of preferential policies in India. Yogendra Yadav emphasises the limitations of current schemes which recognise beneficiaries primarily on the grounds of caste. He argues for a revision of the criteria for identifying beneficiaries beyond a one-dimensional category of caste (2009).

Whilst Mansbridge surmises that designers of representative institutions should accept some of the discussed 'costs' of descriptive representation (1999: 652), a discussion of preferential policies in contemporary India can help to develop an understanding of these issues in a specific context. Evidently, the discrimination and marginal status experienced by specific groups in India has justified government intervention. However, the way in which intervention occurs and its duration should be considered, alongside further issues that arise from the introduction of special provisions for particular groups.¹⁰ The aim of any policy that protects minority interests and reduces inequalities should be the removal of special treatment as quickly

⁹ Affirmative action schemes in India mandate that certain groups are represented in a variety of political institutions, such as at the *pañcāyat* and Municipal level, ensuring that minorities are represented descriptively in these bodies. Descriptive representation in these contexts fit into the latter two contexts described by Mansbridge above: when ability to rule has been unrecognised or questioned in historical contexts or when the group has suffered past discrimination and representation would increase a polity's legitimacy. Mansbridge notes that the symbolic effect of representation is significant, although 'better' substantive representation is not ensured (where representatives advocate for certain groups). The focus is on the symbolic effect of representation, where presence is an important end in itself.

¹⁰ Sowell notes that compensatory preferential policies are a 'politically attractive response', however socially ineffective or counterproductive such policies may be in practice (1990: 167). He addresses four illusions associated with policies which require attention: the illusion of control of complex social interactions (beyond the control of any individual or institution such that policies and incentives are perpetuated); the illusion of knowledge (beyond that of the State to ascertain the different statuses and needs of beneficiaries); the illusion of morality (since policies have a moral rationale such as indignity, historical compensation, victimhood, under-representation); and the illusion of compensation (with the result that sufferers are not compensated nor the effects of historical wrongs redressed, or even identified as sufficiently separate from other social factors at work). See 1990: 119-165.

as possible (Barry 2001: 13). Once it has served its purpose, such legislation would become redundant. Kymlicka argues that policy redressing group interests should be a 'temporary measure on the way to a society where the need for special representation no longer exists' (1995: 141). This is a lasting problem with preferential policies in India. Thomas Sowell notes such schemes (pertaining to the lower houses of both national and state legislatures and employment opportunities in the civil service) were originally scheduled to last ten years but were extended for another ten years in 1959, and then 1969, and then 1980 (1990: 101). Those who drafted the Constitution placed an emphasis on individuals as the unit of reference for the State; however, the Constitution also contains provisions to ensure that 'equality' would be the main goal of Indian democracy. Certain articles prohibit discrimination against any citizen, but allow for the State to make 'special' provision for the advancement of socially and educationally subordinate groups (for example, see Articles 15, 16, and 46).¹¹ The inclusion of these provisions placed an emphasis on groups who could be identified as 'backward'. 'Backward' group identity might be temporal since some inequalities can be removed through special treatment, for example, a lack of education or economic disadvantage. In these cases, special treatment can be employed as a temporary measure. Persistent group inequalities might call for more long-term measures. Corrective measures generate new issues for consideration. McMillan discusses how mechanisms that are implemented to reduce certain inequalities might actually 'institutionalize differences' (1995: 89), an argument reflecting Williams' theorisation of 'Balkanisation'. Preferential treatment and the mechanisms designed to deal with group inequalities change the structures of institutions and political incentives for actors. Sowell notes that incentives create a life of their own, 'independent of—and often counter to—the avowed goals of preferential policies' (1990: 123). When incentives are justified in order to address a social problem associated with a particular group, McMillan argues, these incentives 'often counter efforts to overcome that particular problem' (2005: 89). Policies become entrenched and are defended by individuals who can benefit from them. Sowell argues that claims that measures are temporary are mocked by actual events (in India, for example, see 1990: 101), including

¹¹ Article 15 prohibits discrimination by the State against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, but 15.4 notes that nothing in this article 'shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes'. Article 16 relates to equality of opportunity in regards to public employment or appointment to any office under the State and citizens shall face no discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, or residence. However, 16.4 notes the State can make provisions for the reservation of appointments of posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which is not adequately represented in the State services. Article 46 specifically promotes the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other 'weaker sections'.

the extension of policies, such that both the duration and scope of compensatory policies are uncontrollable (120-127).¹²

ii. *Reservation for Kinnars?*

Issues regarding ‘special’ provisions—that they institutionalise differences and entrench policies, are uncontrollable in practice, and counter efforts to overcome problems—are evident in the Indian context.¹³ Affirmative action schemes were set up, temporarily, to allow access to educational establishments, civil service, and political institutions. Yet, policies have been extended continually to include groups deemed ‘marginalised’. Given that the Constitution provides special treatment for individuals deemed ‘socially and educationally backward’,¹⁴ the State and individual states have been concerned with the definition of these groups and the implementation of provisions to remove inequalities. Identification of beneficiaries has often occurred along caste-based lines, securing caste as a distinguishing feature of political identity,

¹² In contrast, the 2013 US Supreme Court judgment declaring Section 4(b) of the 1965 Voting Rights Act to be unconstitutional exemplifies the removal of a policy seen as no longer responsive to current conditions (the Section contains the formula that determines which jurisdictions are subjected to pre-clearance based on historical discrimination in voting: whether, as of 1 November 1964 the jurisdiction used a ‘test’ or ‘device’ to restrict registration and voting, for example, a literacy test or character reference, and whether less than half of all citizens eligible to vote were registered on 1 November 1964 or voted in the presidential election of November 1964). With Section 4(b) struck down, no jurisdiction would be subject to Section 5 (which requires certain states to obtain federal pre-clearance before implementing changes to laws or voting practices). The Court ruled that the formula was rational at the time of enactment but was not responsive to current needs and represents an overreach of federal power on certain states which have since abandoned discriminatory practices, conflicting with the constitutional principle of ‘equal sovereignty’ among states. The Court removed the provisions that protected minority interests in states in which they experienced historical discrimination, although critics point to the act’s continued relevance in the face of stricter voting laws that make it harder for minorities to vote. In the same week, the Supreme Court held that Section 3 of Defence of Marriage Act (codified as 1 USC § 7, stating that the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex) was unconstitutional as a deprivation of the liberty of the person (Fifth Amendment), prefaced on the logic that equality should be granted to people in long-term relationships, irrespective of sex. These diametrically opposed judgments are based on the notion of equality: equal federal treatment between the states and for individuals to be recognised as equal in relation to marriage. Both judgments highlight a problem indicated by Sowell when he writes that the moral issue is not whether one group deserves compensatory preferences but whether other groups deserve the same compensatory preferences (1990: 170). If the term ‘compensatory’ is removed, and the question is based on equal treatment, then should (a) certain states should be seen as being treated equally by federal government despite the risk that the removal of protections might lead to future discrimination, and (b) should marriage, or state-sanctioned recognition of relationships, be seen as the end to which couples aspire, since marriage ‘privileges sex and love within the framework of the institution of marriage’ (Gross 2008: 247)? See Manayath 2013.

¹³ There is a further issue of counterproductive reactions among both preferred and non-preferred groups, which can affect even members of the preferred groups as members of wider society. One undesired consequence, for example, is a backlash by non-preferred groups (Sowell 1990: 124), for example, the Mandal Commission protests of 1990.

¹⁴ Although the Constitution refers to a ‘backward class of citizens’, it failed to specify which groups this category might contain, or how they might be identified.

despite an intention to remove it as a marker of identity post-independence.¹⁵ In political institutions, provisions were established to provide reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; reservation was extended to 'Other Backward Classes' (hereafter OBC) after the 1980 Mandal Commission Report, which increased quotas from 22.5% to 49.5%.¹⁶ Individual states' reservation quotas are based on populations of marginalised groups in each state; moreover, lists of castes considered for preferential policies change from state to state, especially relating to the OBC category. These measures have 'not yet' eradicated social and economic inequalities so as to warrant removal. Instead, these provisions have provided incentives for groups to be identified as 'backward', have lasted longer than intended, and have become more extensive in number. The incentives available have, as Sowell suggested, countered efforts for groups to overcome their particular status, since groups are invested in proving the 'backwardness' of their caste identity in relation to other groups, cementing caste as a definitive marker of identity in India. Moreover, there are incentives for new groups to prove their 'backwardness', since becoming a beneficiary of redistributive schemes is seen as the means through which to attain goods, office, and power, to which groups would not have had access otherwise.¹⁷ Preferential policies are therefore crucial in maintaining caste identities and in structuring how people relate to caste.

A further issue is that particular marginalised groups are not recognised as beneficiaries since caste does not always dictate economic or social deprivation. Moreover, critics note that preferential schemes have created a 'creamy layer' of beneficiaries in the sense that benefits from compensatory schemes are attained among the already fortunate elites within a beneficiary group, while the lower margins of those caste groups are ignored (Sowell 1990: 156-7, 160). This creates a parallel problem,

¹⁵ Since the State recognises caste as a legitimate basis for social advancement, this criterion provides an opportunity for caste groups to demand preferential treatment and justifies their political mobilisation. Significantly, the boundaries for caste-based action are not fixed. One of the Mandal Commission recommendations explicitly states that a backward class may not remain so for all time, as this would nullify the function of reservation. This opens the question as to who might identify as 'backward'.

¹⁶ The First Backward Classes Commission (the Kaka Kalelkar Commission) was appointed in 1953 to produce a definite policy for 'backward class' reservation. It identified 2,399 'backward' castes or communities. The chairman Kalelkar disowned the basic recommendations of the report due to the problematic nature of assessing beneficiaries along caste-based lines and the report was rejected by the central government for failing to apply objective tests to identify the 'backward class'. In 1961 the Home Ministry invited each state to form its own list of backward classes and fix reservation quotas. These were often implemented according to caste criteria. A Second Commission was appointed in 1978 (the Mandal Commission). It also defined backward classes in caste terms, naming 3,248 castes as 'backward' and proposed a further 27% reservation for Other Backward Classes (in addition to 22.5% for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). For a history of reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, see Sowell 1990, McMillan 2005.

¹⁷ For example, individuals seeking to obtain reserved seats in political bodies must be recognised as a member of a 'backward' group, which can mean attaining a fake caste certificate in order to qualify for such reservation. In Sagar, Kamla Bua's attempt to register for a caste certificate was occasionally seen in this way: that Kamla applied for a certificate to back up her nomination despite not belonging to that caste.

where individual cases may no longer deserve the protection and benefits of preferential policies, even though the caste group as a whole should be protected. In addition, there is a concern that policies focusing on group identity distract from the 'broader promotion of socio-economic egalitarianism' (McMillan 2005: 315). Such measures re-focus the debate on issues of group identity and preferential programmes rather than the real needs of the socio-economically marginalised (*ibid.*). Yadav recognises this problem and critiques the limits of existing affirmative action schemes, writing about the need to reconceptualise how beneficiaries are recognised in the current 'impasse of social justice in India'. He concludes that there is a need to reconceptualise the principles of social justice, redefine target groups and revise the criteria beyond a one-dimensional category of caste, and redesign the mechanism of affirmative action so as to extend beyond reservation policies (2009: 85-7).

There are obvious risks in stressing the benefits of a system of affirmative action. Entrenching preferential schemes deepens caste identities and the need for the system itself through the continual identification of beneficiaries. Adhering strictly to policies that ensure representation can be damaging for other non-beneficiary subordinate minorities. There is a serious concern that a focus on group rights and policies focusing on socio-economic equality might distract from broader questions of socio-economic development and egalitarianism. McMillan writes that the system can 'direct attention away from the substantive issues which determine the situation in which the vast majority of people live' (2005: 326). A focus on electoral reservation promotes a small number of people from subordinate groups, but does not address the biases evident in the system of representation itself. Promoted individuals are not accountable to the groups they are supposed to represent and have little incentive to be responsive to them, outside of the initial needs of their constituents and party supporters (*ibid.*: 327). As McMillan concludes: 'electoral reservation becomes little more than a scheme of political trickle-down, where the substantive interests of the socio-economically disadvantaged are served by symbolic representation, with the hope that, somehow, this will lead to a more equitable society' (*ibid.*). McMillan highlights that symbolic representation does not address broader socio-economic concerns and egalitarianism. While special measures and protections can be provided for groups whose interests and voices might otherwise be marginalised in the political sphere, redistributive measures should be reassessed continually, as suggested by Yadav, to ensure that they respond to the socio-economic needs of recognised and potential beneficiaries.

Despite numerous issues relating to the implementation of preferential policies, there is widespread use of such measures throughout India. To foreground the question of *kinnar* reservation in local political institutions, I now turn to address reservation policies throughout the formal structure of *Pañcāyati Rāj* Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies in MP. These bodies were established to focus primarily on the

issue of rural development through the decentralisation of power, resources, and finances (Goel and Rajneesh 2003: 5). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to the Constitution of India in 1992 mandated the ‘creation of institutions of local self governance’ (Behar 1999: 3242), formalising the system of rural (73rd) and urban (74th) local bodies, which previously existed in a less institutionalised sense. The Amendments provided rural and urban bodies with a formalised structure, functions, planning machinery, detail of devolution of powers, and financial structure. A three-tier system was implemented: village (*grām*), block (*janpad*), and district level (*zila*), to which representatives would be elected every five years. The Amendments provided a reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women in rural and urban bodies, dependent on the population of each groups in different states or regions. In the case of women, it was not less than a third of the total seats available (Basu 2010: 175).¹⁸

Traditionally *pañcāyats* were deliberative bodies, although elite in nature. Arguably the 73rd and 74th Amendments ‘democratised’ these bodies through the inclusion of members from marginalised or vulnerable groups. However, symbolic representation has not necessarily translated into empowerment. Esther Duflo and Petia Topalova note that women (and presumably, by extension, some other members of marginalised groups) elected to reserved seats are poorer, less educated, less experienced, and less likely to be literate than male counterparts (2004: 15). ‘The reality is,’ Medha Kotwal Lele argues, ‘that legal provisions are not proving to be a guarantee for empowerment. The social hierarchies and inequalities that exist in the society, deter the marginalised from even voicing their differences and becoming part of the deliberative process’ (2001: 4703). Representation does not equate to representative ‘equality’ as members from marginalised groups often find themselves ‘re-marginalised’ within the political sphere. Research on local institutions in India provides similar conclusions to those of Williams and Mansbridge regarding the particular difficulties that face marginalised groups within participatory democracies as surveyed earlier, as well as findings from my own research.

Yatindra Singh Sisodia focuses on *grām sabhās* in Madhya Pradesh and assesses village participation (2007). *Grām sabhā* meetings ostensibly involve full village participation, rather than elected representatives, but the question of participation by minority or marginalised groups is crucial. He describes various issues such as dominance by influential locals and their associates; strong caste, class, and gender divides; and low turnout and participation. He writes that the ‘performance and efficacy of *pañcāyats*’ members is strongly influenced by the caste and class distinctions’, asserting that women and minorities are less likely to assert themselves in

¹⁸ For literature on quotas for women and issues of empowerment and participation, see Basu 2010; Black 2006; Jayal 2006; Rai 1999.

participatory settings (see Kulkarni 2012: 159-61). Moreover, individuals are likely to feel that their needs are ignored or subordinated to majority concerns (2007: 22). In my own research, in the cases of Kamla Jaan and Shabnam Mausi, in political settings, I was told that they were mostly quiet and did not initiate discussion or participate beyond what was required. Their needs were ignored or subordinated to the extent that they dealt, for the most part, with the development of the overall community and did not focus on the *kinnar* community specifically. Kamla Bua was the only *kinnar* in office and I was able to attend a bi-monthly Municipal Corporation meeting in February 2011. Kamla Bua presided over the three-hour meeting, attended by the Corporation Commissioner, members of the Municipal Corporation (including the majority of the 48 ward corporators), and members of the Sagar press. She barely participated, only speaking when directly called upon.¹⁹ This was also the case for the female ward corporators in the room; there were about ten women present who sat behind their male counterparts in both blocks of seating in the room (divided between Congress and BJP candidates). The main participants were the BJP Mayor-in-Council members, male members of the Congress party on the front bench of seating, and the Commissioner.

Reservation in rural and urban local bodies is designed to include previously unrepresented groups into decentralised political bodies more formally. Most bodies—aside from *grām sabhās*, which require direct participation—operate through the use of elected representatives²⁰ and marginalised groups can benefit from reservation policies. Reservation is a useful mechanism for ensuring symbolic representation, despite limitations as to its ability to empower previously marginalised groups. However, as mentioned above, there are marginalised social groups in India who do not benefit from existing schemes designed to reduce inequalities. Many have good reasons for wishing to be included as beneficiaries, based on previous or current marginalised status. Arguably, the community of *kinnars* could benefit from preferential policies due to the ostracised nature of the community from mainstream society based on their perceived non-normative sexual and gender status, but *kinnars* are not recognised currently as beneficiaries. One reason may be because they do not form an identifiable, singular caste group.

¹⁹ Similarly, in her discussion of a *grām sabhā* in Soonaghalli, Karnataka, Vani Kulkarni notes that the lower-caste president was ‘predominantly’ a mute spectator, who remained silent and appeared as a ‘nominal head’, respected because he ‘occupied a formal position, rather than because he exercised authority’ (2012: 160). In contrast, Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo argue that the identity of a decision maker can influence policy decisions, pointing to the significance of women and Scheduled Castes as policy makers (2004a, 2004b). Evidently, in certain circumstances, reservation can have a causal effect on policy that is relevant to the needs of their own genders.

²⁰ For literature on *grām sabhās* and *grām pañcāyats* see Manor 2001; Singh 2002; Behar 2001, 2003; Kela 2003. These articles outline the strengths and weaknesses of local bodies in MP, primarily since MP was one of the first states to institute a more formalised system of PRIs and urban local bodies after the 73rd and 74th Amendments, in order to aid development and improve administration (Behar 1999: 3242).

Since caste is the primary criterion in identifying beneficiaries, it is necessary to discuss the factor of *kinnar* caste identity and political participation. Given the significance of caste in the petition brought against Kamla Bua, Kamla spoke about a 'significant' view of caste that the *kinnar* community hold (Interview, 7/3/11). *Kinnars* join the community from a variety of caste and religious backgrounds and many join as young children. Kamla said *gurus* often tell the children what caste they were born into when they are teenagers or grown up.²¹ Her *guru* revealed her caste to her when she was eighteen. She insisted that *kinnars* should choose their own caste, a decision that might be influenced by the state or region and household in which they live. Choosing one's caste allows individuals to decide how they want to be recognised, which is significant for an ostracised group, although, it is clear that such choice may not be recognised or intelligible to wider society, as evidenced by Kamla Bua's choice of castelessness and the court's decision that such a choice was unintelligible, or at least at odds, within an existing framework of categorisation (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, or Other Backward Caste). Kamla suggested that *kinnars* should be allowed to choose their own caste as part of a process of working out where they are located in society and how they might gain from certain, but not other, identifications. Whatever the 'original' caste status of *kinnars*, *kinnar* identity bestows upon them a low status in society. High-caste status does not privilege *kinnars* so identifying with a lower-caste group at least provides a means by which they might alleviate their position through reservation (if, in turn, that identification is recognised and seen as valid): identification is crucial in order to receive benefits. The judgment that unseated Kamla applied the category 'Scheduled Caste' in strict terms: since she could not prove her status (despite attaining a caste certificate), she was unseated. The egalitarian principle behind preferential policies is to alleviate the position or status of members of socially and economically 'backward' groups. However, there are groups who are not recognised as beneficiaries, including *kinnars*, religious minorities who converted from lower castes, and other castes who simply do not fall under state lists of beneficiaries. I put this argument to K. V. S. Thakur, the advocate for the petition against Kamla, asking whether Kamla's marginalised status as a *kinnar* meant that she might qualify to contest a seat reserved for a community deemed 'backward' given the socially 'backward' status of the *kinnar* community, even if she were not a 'legitimate' member of the Scheduled Castes.²² He replied that since she did not have 'Scheduled Caste status' she did not contest the seat legally and therefore should be unseated. He argued that this should be the outcome of the trial, despite acknowledging the numerous social and economic difficulties faced by *kinnars*. He said that reservation could be

²¹ Sometimes *kinnars* do not know the caste of the child: one *guru*, Imran, told me that she adopted a child that she found abandoned (Interview, 14/7/11).

²² I use the term 'legitimate' since the court ultimately unseated her based on lack of proof of caste status despite Kamla having a Scheduled Caste certificate.

extended to cover the *kinnar* community, but they could not benefit under existing categories,²³ revealing a disparity between policies intended to extend representation to marginalised groups and the practicality of recognising beneficiaries. On the one hand, some *kinnars* argue that policies should be extended to include their community,²⁴ but on the other, other members say that there should be no extension since they fail to assess actual socio-economic needs. Moreover, recognising *kinnars* as beneficiaries would entrench the assumption of *kinnar* identity as marginalised even further. This point reflects my argument regarding the double ‘meaning’ of representation, indicating that a re-presentation of *kinnar* identity is continually undertaken in practices that supposedly ensure political representation. However, while reservation policies regarding *kinnars* could be considered under an extension of gender quotas to address inequalities, *kinnars* are not recognised as beneficiaries, which may explain why *kinnar* individuals challenged reserved seats as a way of accessing electoral representation, such as in the cases of Kamla Jaan and Kamla Bua, challenging a woman’s seat and a Scheduled Caste woman’s seat respectively. One interpretation of these actions could be that ‘pretending’ to belong to such categories could undermine *kinnars* stressing the ‘realness’ of *kinnar* subjecthood, by contesting seats reserved for other candidates, given that *kinnars* posited the realness of their identity to establish their difference from ‘fake *kinnar* politicians’. However, ‘woman’ and *kinnar*, and ‘woman’, *kinnar*, and Scheduled Caste, may not be mutually exclusive categories: in Kamla Jaan’s case, she sees herself as both female and *kinnar*, and in Kamla Bua’s case, she sees herself as Scheduled caste, as well as positing her identity as ‘female *kinnar*’. Voters did not seem to interpret the practice of contesting a reserved seat and identifying as ‘female’ or ‘Scheduled Caste’ as incompatible with *kinnar* identity, positing *kinnars* as ‘equally’ fake as previous politicians. *Kinnars* and their supporters portrayed the realness of their identity to undermine previous politicians, representing *kinnars* as different from such individuals, so identification with existing categories (which they identify with nonetheless) allowed access to electoral representation, which, at that point, did not include a category for *kinnar* identity specifically.

I want to turn now to consider how *kinnars* were re-presented (in the second sense as theorised by Spivak) through discourses surrounding their campaigns and elections, focusing on the construction of *kinnar* identity as lacking.

²³ There are moves towards securing special provisions for *kinnars* more recently in India and I discuss these in Chapter Five.

²⁴ For example, the All Odisha Eunuch’s Association met state government officials in June 2013, demanding two percent reservation in government jobs in the state (*India Today* 2013).

III. Constructing *Kinnar* Identity through Rhetoric

The elections of *kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh indicate that *kinnars* were supposedly representative of their constituents more generally and not the *kinnar* community specifically. I want to analyse the relationship that was manufactured between *kinnars* as ‘representatives’ and their constituents. *Kinnars* were re-presented as embodying the characteristics that people wanted in their politicians, where stereotypical *kinnar* traits were manipulated through political rhetoric to present *kinnars* in a specific way. Hall writes that representation can be analysed through the ‘signs, symbols, figures, images, narratives, words, and sounds—the material forms—in which symbolic meaning is circulated’ (2002: 9). In the following discussion, I concentrate on various, concrete forms of representation advanced during the electoral campaigns of Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausai, and Kamla Bua, including analysing electoral rhetoric, slogans, symbols, rumours, and general stereotypes circulating about the *kinnar* community. I note here that contradictory representations of *kinnars* were employed, which are discussed below; a contradiction of representation that reflects Homi K. Bhabha’s theorisation of ambivalence, which is central to the stereotype (1983). I argue that this re-presentation of *kinnar* identity in the political sphere had an influence on the way *kinnars* were seen by the public, thus impacting the creation and construction of contemporary *kinnar* identity itself. A form of political ‘*kinnar*’ identity was shaped through the electoral space, by the people who elected them, those who did not support them, and by *kinnars* themselves. The way *kinnar* identity was constructed during campaigning alluded to a certain understanding of *kinnars* as self-sacrificing individuals who were equipped to serve their constituents better because they lacked normal social ties, such as to family, community, or caste or religious group.

i. Lack of Experience, Lack of Kinship, and the Aspect of Fear

‘Political’ *kinnar* identity built upon certain characteristics that were desired, but lacking, in professional politicians. These characteristics included being self-sacrificing, able to serve their constituents, and incorruptible. This representation is striking given the usual character portrayal of *kinnars* in Indian society, where they are depicted as money-grabbing, greedy, and selfish individuals who do little to serve society, but instead demand and take things for themselves. This was a common perception that interviewees had; when asked what they usually thought about *kinnars*, people described their behaviour on passenger trains, where *kinnars* demand money from men and, if displeased, threaten them, including raising their skirts. The repetition of this behaviour demonstrates the sort of behaviour commonly associated with *kinnars*. In

contrast to negative stereotypes, a specifically political identity was propagated during election campaigns, which developed an image of each *kinnar* as an individual who could serve the population better, or at least less badly, than previous politicians. None of the *kinnars* had political experience but this apparent disadvantage was promoted as a strength. Campaigners argued that *kinnars* did not belong to political parties and thus had no interest in serving that party or their agenda. More importantly, it was suggested that because *kinnars* had no family, kinship, or even caste affiliation they had no one for whom they would be corrupt: this line of argument was bolstered with the pervasive knowledge of *kinnars'* marginalisation in society, as outsiders to normative Indian social structures, such as natal family and caste grouping. These arguments were used as a contrastive foil against corrupt and ineffective local politicians, whose ineffective and corrupt behaviour resulted in anger and resentment among the general population. *Kinnars* thus were portrayed as having a radical liberatory potential in embodying complete difference from the (hetero-)normative subject of Indian politics; a representation that mirrors Michael Warner's invocation of queerness as a means by which to undo heteronormativity, drawing upon 'dissatisfaction with the regime of the normal in general' (1993: xxvii). *Kinnars* had the potential to offer a different politics, one of honesty, incorruptibility, and one that was based upon a completely different practice of politics from the heteronormative mould (which was demonstrated as having 'failed', resulting in the election of individuals who represented 'something else'). *Kinnars* embodied this radical potential; such a conceptual possibility was transmitted through such rhetoric that portrayed them as what previous politicians were not, as candidates who were the exact opposite to the norm.

From the outset of each movement *kinnars'* lack of political experience was considered an asset. No *kinnar* had contested an election before, nor had they been involved in social work or with the community. It was commonly assumed that *kinnars* had little knowledge of affairs outside their own community:

In politics, or in other affairs of worldly life, they are ignorant. We might say they are 'illiterate'. Their only job is to visit those houses where a newborn baby is born...they give their blessings and they [dance]...They take some money from those houses. This is their main job. And [aside from] this job, they are ignorant in all other affairs of society.

(Kosta Interview, 22/2/11)

As if to demonstrate her political inexperience, for example, Kamla Jaan spoke very little during her campaign, and instead was presented as a demure and respectable figurehead. She hardly ever gave a speech, but instead was represented by those who masterminded her campaign, who, in effect, spoke for her. Journalist Anil Tiwari described this tactic, saying:

She was not able to talk, she did not know how to give a lecture, and she did not speak during the campaign. She just stood on a vehicle or rickshaw, with folded

hands, and her supporters asked for votes. For the whole of the campaign, this was the technique... Suppose I stand like this and another person says, '[this] is Kamla, and she has the symbol of *maṭkā* (earthen pot)', so this was the technique. Suddenly she came to politics and she did not know how to do anything.

(Tiwari Interview, 22/2/11)

This unassuming performance was in line with her personality, compared to both Shabnam Mausi's and Kamla Bua, who were much more forceful and played up to stereotypes associated with *kinnar* personalities during their campaigns, such as making jokes and using '*kinnar* gestures' in their interactions with people.²⁵ Their lack of political experience was presented as a strength: *kinnars* were portrayed as trustworthy individuals, since they had no formal links to local politics or parties, and thus had no reason to be greedy, nepotistic, or corrupt.

The *kinnar* community's status as a marginalised and subordinate group was presented as a further advantage. Although *kinnars* have their own communities that function much like conventional social networks, they were perceived as lacking the natal and kinship ties that professional politicians have and frequently 'abuse', which makes them corrupt.²⁶ This representation obscures the fact that *kinnars* live in identifiable households and communities, but these were perceived as unusual forms of sociality and supplementary or secondary to, and certainly not as significant as, normative social formations. Anil Tiwari stated that Kamla Jaan only gave one interview during her election campaign to the Katni based newspaper, *City Vision*, saying: 'the leaders are worse than me, and, as I have no kith and kin, so who will benefit from my corrupt practices? I will be honest and do something for the city' (Interview, 22/2/11). Another journalist Chandra Shekhar Tripathi recalled the same sentiment was expressed by Shabnam Mausi in Shahdol: 'people felt that [because] Shabnam was a *kinnar*, she would not do the same wrongdoings as others, and because she has no family, she will do less financial irregularities...she is alone: how much money does she need for herself?' (Interview, 6/4/11).

The argument that they did not desire to contest the elections benefitted Kamla Jaan and Shabnam Mausi since they did not decide to contest the elections but were persuaded by campaigners. Kamla Bua, however, contested the Sagar election under the premise that she was entering politics in order to fight for *kinnars'* rights. Nonetheless, it was well known that she was wealthy and this knowledge helped

²⁵ Many interviewees noted that once in politics, all of the *kinnars* changed their behaviour, such as not using the *kinnar* hand-clap and speaking in a more formal manner. However for the purposes of campaigning, I was told that both Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua employed stereotypes held about the community, particularly in gestures and speech.

²⁶ For example, Shabnam's rival, Brijesh Singh, was one of several candidates whom the Congress Party could have nominated, but he was chosen, in part, because he was the son of the former MLA who had proven his popularity in Shahdol by winning multiple elections for Congress. Both Brijesh and the state party must have hoped that those who supported his father would support him.

people believe she was sincere in serving her own community and the people of Sagar, rather than using public office to advance her wealth. When asked why *kinnars* make good politicians, Kamla Bua replied that they have no family or relations and no other interests of their own (Interview, 2/2/11). During her campaign, she referred to herself as a *kinnar*, alluding to the fact that she had 'no' children, unlike 'normal people'.²⁷ She stated in lieu of her own children, the whole city was like her family. Journalist Sudesh Tiwari referred to these words as 'emotional blackmail', making each person feel that she would care for them (Interview, 28/2/11). He recalled that she said if she won, she would 'take care of every member of the city as her own family, because she herself has no children, everyone in the city would be like a child to her'. He suggested that her words 'shaped people's minds' in her favour (*ibid.*). Voters assumed that a lack of social bonds would result in *kinnars'* incorruptibility and loyalty to their locality, even voters who supported other candidates. Journalist Arvind Gupta noted that people loyal to, or even members of, mainstream parties in personal interactions (so as to avoid recrimination) would express the opinion that Kamla Jaan was new to politics and had 'no kith and kin' and thought 'she would not be involved in corruption and she would be more honest' (Interview, 30/1/11).

A further consideration is the factor of 'fear' that is commonly associated with *kinnar* identity particularly regarding their ability to curse.²⁸ This fear references mythology in which men who anger Bahuchara Mata or other *hijras* are turned into *hijras* themselves, or made impotent. These myths suggest that *hijra* identity is a curse or a punishment. Being cursed is linked to anger and anger is seen as a common behavioral trait associated with *kinnars*. Fear of being cursed or of angering *kinnars* was mentioned several times to me: this was especially the case with Shabnam Mausī, whose anger and temper is well known among the townspeople of Anuppur and Shahdol. Shahdol-based politician Shankar Prasad Sharma said that if she were angered 'something bad could happen, because people believe their blessings have weight' (Interview, 5/4/11). In Sagar, journalist Sudesh Tiwari mentioned that 'fear' is widespread in society, because *kinnars'* blessings are believed to be sacred. Therefore, people should not hurt them 'in case they get angry and curse you' (Interview,

²⁷ In contrast, she declared to me that she had many children, whom she had adopted from lower-caste families. However they were not biological offspring and presenting herself as 'childless' was necessary to the representation that *kinnars* had no family.

²⁸ It was hard to assess people's 'level' of fear. While many educated and cosmopolitan Indians seemed to disregard this fear, they still received *kinnars* into their homes for blessings and gave them money in return, as is customary. In relation to *kinnar* politicians, women were represented as being more afraid than the men in the family (often, by their husbands or fathers). This is despite *kinnar* curses being directed towards men and the anecdotal evidence of women interacting better with *kinnars* (see Reddy 2003, Nanda 1999). In one instance, an interviewee told me that his daughter feared having that *kinnar* come to their home and would do whatever she could to please the *kinnar*, including giving gifts. This woman, the interviewee told me, had a postgraduate degree and several children, but still feared this *kinnar's* anger.

28/2/11). At the same time people expressed this belief however, they often smiled, indicating the paradoxical nature of this fear and belief.

As discussed earlier, there was widespread anger at both the BJP and Congress for fielding corrupt, inefficient, or unsuitable candidates. The representation of *kinnars* as politically inexperienced individuals who lacked normative social ties fed into a discourse regarding commendable characteristics for politicians and the aspect of fear worked as a further factor in building support for their candidacies. Campaigners presented *kinnars* as 'real' candidates against 'fake *kinnar*' (read: impotent) candidates. I have previously discussed rhetoric in India equating bad or incompetent politicians with '*hijras*' or '*kinnars*', persuading voters to support a 'real' *kinnar* instead of an politically 'impotent' politician. Hall argues that the term '*hijra*' is used as a derogatory epithet, used by and about politicians. She notes that Hindi poets and novelists have used this illusion, including the poet Ved Prakash Vatuk in a number of political critiques (1997: 444). She also describes how in Khushwant Singh's novel, *Delhi*, he describes his narrator as a *hijra*, 'who was neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone' (1989: 55 in *ibid.*).²⁹ This metaphor was employed in all three election campaigns, equating political incompetence with bodily impotence but distinguishing *kinnars* from impotent politicians. Journalist Sanjay Kareer noted that campaigners in Sagar promoted the allusion that mayors in the past behaved like '*hijras*' (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). Therefore, the logic was that voters should elect a 'real' *kinnar* and hope she will perform her duties and take care of society. Voting against corrupt politicians might be interpreted as demonstrating local voters' power. Katni-based journalist Nandlal Singh stated that even though there are low literacy rates in places like Katni, this should not be equated with stupidity. He said that people were 'literate' in the sense that they were knowledgeable through practical life experience. He read Kamla Jaan's campaign as 'resistance', sending a 'clear cut message' to politicians that voters did not like how they behaved. A *kinnar* therefore provided an alternative solution and caught hold of the voters' imagination (Gupta Interview, 30/1/11).

ii. Producing Campaigns: Donations, Slogans, and Symbols

Each campaign started slowly with a small support base, but was taken up with enthusiasm by local voters. People supported the candidates with gusto, driving the campaigns forward, including giving financial support by means of donations. Shabnam said she only had to spend one lakh and Rs 25,000 of her own money

²⁹ The implication of being 'misused' is revealing: *kinnars* too, opened themselves up to be misused, through the manipulation of their identity in the political sphere. I discuss this further below and in Chapter Four.

(Interview, 20/1/11). Kamla Bua told me that she only spent Rs 25,000 of her own money, and that everything else, including banners, flags, and posters, was arranged for her: she said that this is what made it a people's campaign (Interview, 2/2/11). Kamla's contribution is meagre, given speculative estimates of five to seven lakhs spent on her campaign in total (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). Journalist Sudesh Tiwari noted that groups who supported Kamla's candidature gave prominent local newspapers packages containing advertisements for print, urging people to vote in her favour (*ibid.*).

Campaigns were conducted differently to normal local campaigns; the main vehicle for gaining momentum and support was by word of mouth (Tiwari Interview, 22/2/11; Chanchal Interview, 5/3/11; Mishra Interview, 4/4/11). Notably, campaigns were informal. Each *kinnar* took to the streets with campaigners to meet potential voters. Dilip Chanchal, a local merchant in Sagar, noted that people enjoyed Kamla Bua's campaign because it lacked the serious air that other campaigns had, where politicians would simply shake people's hands and ask for votes (Interview, 5/3/11).

One important way campaigners spread their message was through the use of slogans and symbols. These are common in electoral campaigns, but proved particularly effective in these three cases. Campaigners invented simple phrases and memorable symbols to help voters easily identify their candidates. This was important given that campaigners aimed *kinnars'* campaigns at lower-caste and -class voters in each locality. This fact is supported by the informal nature of each campaign, which was primarily conducted in market places, crowded local streets where people did their shopping or passed time, visiting a variety of local wards to speak to potential voters, and in the vehicles chosen for and by *kinnar* candidates to present them as 'ordinary' individuals, for example, hiring an auto-rickshaw to take Kamla Jaan to file her nomination papers. Given the lower-caste and -class support base, it was important to pick simple slogans and symbols for voters to remember and talk about, especially given below average levels of illiteracy among the voting population. Choosing easy to remember election material also meant that individual voters would remember and discuss them, promoting each candidate.

I mentioned one memorable slogan (*kamal nahīn, Kamla cāhie; pañc nahīn, chakkā cāhie*) used during Kamla Jaan's campaign. The slogan was also used during Kamla Bua's campaign in Sagar. Local journalist Sanjay Kareer said it came from the Katni election and was used because their first names were the same (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11).³⁰ The slogan's reappearance in Sagar attests to its effectiveness, nine years

³⁰ Mr Tiwari noted that it was the second half of the slogan that was more popular in 2009. He did not explain why, and it seems strange given that it was the BJP who were the main rivals in the Sagar election, whereas the Congress party was seen as split by internal conflicts and less unified (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). I speculate it might have been the use of the term '*chakkā*',

after Kamla Jaan's election. A further testament to its memorable nature is that numerous interviewees in Katni repeated it to me in 2011. Campaign symbols also proved important. Kamla Jaan had a symbol of an earthenware pot, Shabnam Mausi had the symbol of a kite, and Kamla Bua had the symbol of a key. Each symbol can be interpreted in a variety of ways: the pot as a modest and familiar vessel, representing Kamla's traditional values; the kite as symbol of flying high, like the hopes of those who voted for Shabnam; the key as a symbol to 'unlocking' development, the city, to 'lock' out corruption. Symbols appear next to candidates' names on the voting paper. In the 2009 Sagar election, a second candidate's name appeared on the voting paper as 'Kamla Bai *Kinnar*' to cause confusion and draw votes away from Kamla Bua. Her symbol helped voters cast their vote in her favour.

Throughout the campaigns, there was a deliberate construction of *kinnar* identity in each political locality, manufactured by campaigners, voters, and *kinnars* themselves. Each was re-presented as a self-sacrificing and incorruptible individual, demonstrating characteristics that voters wanted their politicians to embody. A version of *kinnar* identity was presented to the public, contrasting previous assumptions and stereotypes held about the community. A discussion of the material forms in which representation occurred, including political rhetoric, narratives, slogans, and reinterpreting common assumptions of *kinnars* (such as having no kinship networks) has revealed that *kinnar* identity was actively re-presented and brought into being through the shared cultural space of local politics in MP. I want now to address in more detail the ways in which *kinnar* identity was re-presented as 'lacking', in relation to gender, caste, religion, and community. *Kinnar* identity was presented negatively in the sense that their identity was defined by which it was not. The practice of identifying what traits and social bonds that *kinnars* lacked ultimately served to maintain their marginality by placing importance on it in relation to their ability to be a good politician.

iii. *Identity as 'Lack': Gender, Caste, Religion, and Community*

All three *kinnar* politicians were represented as individuals who lacked normative characteristics, with particular reference to aspects of gender, community, religion, and caste. Inasmuch as *kinnars* came to be conceptualised as beings of lack, they became more malleable in the public's eyes as able to represent multiple communities at the same time. They could be identified with different, and occasionally contradictory, subject positions often assumed to be mutually exclusive and thus had the potential to appeal to a wider base of voters. This supports the theory of descriptive representation,

the derogatory slang word for a *kinnar*, which people enjoyed using, referencing rhetoric alluding to impotent professional politicians, also sometimes called '*chakka*'.

where individuals represent constituents with whom they share either identifiable characteristics or shared common experience. *Kinnar* identity was presented as 'fluid' in the sense that it could absorb the demands of multiple identity groups who desired representation. *Kinnars'* 'lack' of identity was promoted as a strength.

The first and most obvious marker of *kinnar* identity was gender liminality. The law in MP allows *kinnars* to choose their gender insofar as it is recognised formally and recorded on the electoral roll. The majority of *kinnars*, including Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, identify as female, although on occasion I heard people describe them as male. People's uncertainty about *kinnars'* gender was demonstrated when speaking about them: people would fluctuate between male and female pronouns or use them interchangeably, sometimes not knowing which to use and correcting themselves once they had become aware of it. *Kinnars'* choice of gender did not mean public acceptance of that choice.³¹ People who did not respect them or value their time in office often, perhaps deliberately, referred to them as male. On occasion, I noted that slippages would occur when making jokes at their expense. Among the general public, there seems to be confusion regarding what a male *kinnar* or a female *kinnar* is, a confusion sometimes repeated among *kinnars* themselves. *Kinnars* themselves and other people trying to explain their gender identity identified them as a 'third' gender, occupying a space that was considered neither male nor female.³²

Kinnars occupy a space in the Indian imagination that holds them distinct from male or female, but recognises them as conforming to or deviating from one or the other. Equally in the political realm, there was a negotiation regarding whether to treat them as 'male' or 'female' politicians. Significantly, they were not treated as male politicians, but were treated with the deference and respect shown a female politician in an equal position. The term 'Mausi' (maternal 'aunt') was coined for Shabnam after she had decided to stand for election, and 'Jaan' and 'Bua' are terms of respect given to elder female 'family' members: 'Jaan' meaning 'dear' and used to denote 'familial' relations or an acquaintance and 'Bua' used for a paternal aunt.

People did not expect them to behave as a female politician might, but expected behaviour that was perceived as 'unfeminine', such as swearing or becoming aggressive. Such behaviour was associated with *kinnars* outside the political sphere, and was demonstrated by each *kinnar* on occasion, such as Shabnam Mausi's fight with fellow MLA Bisahulal Singh in the Bhopal Assembly, and Kamla Jaan's willingness to

³¹ The most obvious rejection of a *kinnar's* gender choice was the petition challenging Kamla Jaan's election. The court ruled that she was a *hijra* and thus, technically, a castrated man (Suresh 2011). Mayor Asha Devi of Gorakhpur in UP and Kamla Bua also had their gender liminality questioned, resulting in their unseating.

³² The gender *kinnars* identify with is demonstrable through sartorial and speech patterns. Occasionally *kinnars* fluctuate between male and female patterns of speech but do not use a separate third pattern of speech (equivalent to the 'ze' form used by certain gender-neutral or gender-political groups in the West) or dress or act in a way that is entirely separate from male and female or an equal merging of the two.

berate Municipal Corporation members who did not take their work seriously. People expected their behaviour as 'politicians' to be different to that of experienced politicians, since all three did not have previous political experience and were seen as unaware of how to conduct themselves in the public sphere. All three *kinnars* sometimes behaved in ways that was interpreted as due to their identity as *kinnars* and this was interpreted as 'unfeminine', despite being addressed and treated for most purposes as a female politician would be.

A second marker of identity that was called into question was caste status and religious belief. In the eyes of the general public, *kinnars* do not have discernible, identifiable caste or religious identities and do not see individual identifications as paradoxical with membership of the wider group. Therefore, the caste or religious identity of a particular individual cannot be known, since the group, as a whole, evades strict definition along caste or religious lines. Caste and religious liminality was used as an asset, so that each *kinnar* was represented as standing for multiple subject positions simultaneously, particularly in the cases of Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua. Both their campaigns capitalised on the way in which Shabnam and Kamla's religious and caste identities were seen as unfixed or unknown because they belonged to the *kinnar* community. In both cases, there were discrepancies between the way in which they saw themselves and the way in which others represented them.

In Shabnam's case, her self-proclaimed Brahmin status was a positive force in generating support for her. Journalist Chandra Shekhar Tripathi said that Shabnam claimed to be from a Brahmin family and he suggested that this won her support among Brahmin voters. No Brahmin candidate had won a seat for many years and this made it likely that they would support a candidate from their own caste (Interview, 6/4/11). Kamla Bua's self-declared adherence to Islam is said to have gained her support among Muslim voters. At the last stage of her campaign, Kamla's supporters started 'spreading rumours' that she was a Muslim and a Hajji, in order to demonstrate her religiosity and thus 'make an influence on a particular section of society' (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). On the other hand, there were other rumours spread about Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua that could challenge their self-asserted Brahmin and Muslim status. Shahdol-based journalist Kailash Aggarwal noted that some people were sympathetic to Shabnam's cause before the election because they believed she was a Muslim and gave her support (Interview, 6/4/11). There were also multiple rumours at the time of Kamla Bua's election. One rumour was that Kamla was the daughter of a Brahmin family (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11; I heard this rumour myself in neighbouring Katni).³³ It was believed that this rumour was begun by the Bhartiya

³³ I asked journalist Sanjay Kareer how this was possible: Kamla was presented as a Brahmin but she was contesting a seat reserved for a person from the Scheduled Caste category. I noted that it did not make sense since a Brahmin is clearly not Scheduled Caste; in reply, Mr Kareer

Janshakti Party's district president, Sandhya Bhargav, to generate support for Kamla Bua and undermine the BJP candidate's chances.

In both cases, the identity of the *kinnar* candidate in question was manipulated to appeal to different voting factions. Journalist Sanjay Kareer noted that in many cases, voters of your own caste 'will blindly support you' (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). By having multiple (and believable) caste and religious identities, *kinnars* were more appealing to different voters. These incompatible rumours were more believable than with other candidates since *kinnars*' 'actual' caste and religious status was perceived as 'undecided'—or at least, in flux—and could not be tied down to a specific identification. People also assumed that *kinnars* moved between different identities. An anonymous interviewee described Shabnam Mausi in this way: 'sometimes she says "I am a Brahmin", and on her nomination form, she signed as a Mohammadan. And as for lands, he grabbed the land as a Tribal' (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11).³⁴ The perception of a fluid identity was useful in generating potential voters' support, since Shabnam could appeal simultaneously to Brahmin, Muslim, and Tribal voters. Seeing *kinnar* identity as fluid might have made people suspicious, interpreting their fluid identifications as 'untrustworthy'. However, rumours that presented *kinnars* as embodying apparently mutually exclusive identities did not seem to cause an issue for voters because there was a chance that they might be true. These rumours widened the support base of each candidate, giving *kinnars* an advantage over other candidates who only appealed to a smaller contingent of voters with whom they shared common descriptive characteristics or experiences. Candidates usually represent the communities which they are from and cannot appeal to other caste identities in the same way that they appeal to their own. However *kinnars* had the potential to represent multiple groups simultaneously and thus were more appealing to a variety of communities.

A third aspect linked with caste status and religious practice is that of community. Since *kinnar* groups are not linked to other social networks in Indian society, *kinnars* are perceived as 'outside' of society. More often than not, practices linked to *kinnar* society are shrouded in secrecy and makes it more difficult for the wider population to understand *kinnar* society. As a result, *kinnars* are seen as 'community-less', in the sense that their society fails to correspond with heteronormative and patriarchal social models common in India.

The perception of a 'lack' of community and a lack of firm caste and religious identities meant that *kinnars* appeared to belong to a range of identity categories, at

said, 'it makes no difference which caste you belong to as a candidate only...'. I offered: 'what you can prove?' and he smiled (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11).

³⁴ The land in question (on which Shabnam wanted to build her house) was apparently reserved for members of the Scheduled Tribes, so Shabnam, according to this interviewee, assumed a Scheduled Tribe identity in order to get it for herself.

least for the purposes of representing various groups as political candidates. An assumed 'lack' of social identity meant that *kinnar* identity could be reconceived in relation to the wider communities in which they lived, in the sense of forging a relationship between *kinnars* and their localities. This can be demonstrated by rhetoric that presented *kinnars* as having no family. People interpreted a lack of social bonds as a factor that would make them more loyal to their constituents, whom they saw as their surrogate families. Kamla Bua expressly said that she would take care of every member of the city since they were like her children (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). Proof of loyalty to the city might also be read into Shabnam's payment of the Burhar Municipality's electricity bill. The act was politically savvy: Shabnam intimated how she might provide for her district if elected. Shabnam established that she cared for them and in this act, confirmed she was one of them. Evidently there are other interpretations: for example, that Shabnam was trying too hard to represent herself as a caring person, by performing an act that other politicians would not have done. Or that she was toying with their emotions and performing a bribe in return for votes, even if she had no intention of acting the same way once in office. However, Shabnam endeared herself to the electorate by this gesture and demonstrated how she felt about them, even if she had her own motives. In fact, another interpretation of this gesture indicates her ability as politician, given that the act worked and was remembered years after.

The discussion of gender, religion, caste, and community has indicated that *kinnar* identity was manipulated in certain ways to represent *kinnars* as good political candidates. *Kinnars* were re-presented as 'lacking' normal social identities and this lack made them more suitable politicians in the eyes of the voting public. These new representations were propagated and affected how the mainstream public saw *kinnar* identity. *Kinnars* were perceived as able to adopt a variety of subject positions and identities, making them more attractive as representative (in the sense of descriptive) candidates to a variety of groups in the community. Campaigns highlighted *kinnars'* gender, caste, religious, and communal liminality and thus their difference from normative social categories was emphasised in this presentation. Their existence on the margins of gendered practices, social spaces, and religious and caste boundaries were adopted and reiterated by campaigners and voters, reinforcing an understanding of *kinnar* identity that was characterised as lacking social identifications and networks. However, since *kinnars* were represented in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways, such as belonging to various caste and religious groupings, the category of *kinnar* identity itself managed to retain some of its fluidity and indefinability. This indefinability meant that *kinnar* identity was only made positive inasmuch as it constituted a distinct subject position, albeit through its emphasis on what *kinnars* lacked. *Kinnars* had to trade on the definitions and characteristics that maintained their

status as a marginal group at the very same time that they sought to attain a central role in mainstream society. Participation in the political sphere thus reified their marginality, so that *kinnars* were defined as what they were not and did not have.

Kinnar 'political' identity was conceptualised as 'lacking' with the result that individual *kinnars* were able to take on a variety of subject positions or identities—even ones seen as mutually exclusive—with a degree of ease. Indeed, an ability to be subsumed into pre-fixed group identities was an important strength in a political contest, where candidates logically vie to appeal to multiple groups with multiple interests at the same time. This ability seemed to fit naturally with *kinnars*' identities, whose existence already revolved around existing at the margins of society, and thus *kinnars* were well placed to adopt and inhabit fixed categories that were intelligible to the mainstream public. For the people who initiated the campaigns in Katni and Shahdol, Kamla Jaan, and Shabnam Mausi were inspired choices, for their identities as *kinnars*—and the way in which a particular understanding of *kinnar* identity was manipulated—were used successfully to appeal to a variety of social groups who might not otherwise support the same candidate. Kamla Bua capitalised on her identity as a *kinnar* by moulding herself into what the public wanted in a mayoral candidate and a focus on her identity as a *kinnar* above everything else was adopted by varying support groups in order to gain support and damage the chances of rival candidates.

IV. Representatives and Constituents: Theorising Relationships

I want to turn to theorise the relationship between representatives and their constituents, in order to discuss the extent to which *kinnars* functioned as representatives—in terms of both speaking 'for' and speaking 'as'—of their constituents in MP. I will argue that there are two conclusions to be drawn. First, *kinnars* cannot be said to be representative since they failed to represent their constituents effectively (in the sense of speaking 'for'), and nor did they embody the same descriptive characteristics as their constituents (in the sense of speaking 'as'). What they did 'represent' was the disillusion felt by constituents with local political processes and politicians and were a symbol of their anger. Second, the main issue with *kinnars*' participation was that representation in local political bodies only served to reify the marginality of *kinnar* identity in the political sphere. As mentioned above, *kinnars* had to trade on the very characteristics that maintained their marginality in contemporary Indian society, meaning that time spent in politics did little to change their situation, since it emphasised what was seen as negative about the community, albeit in relation to local political discourse.

i. *Assessing Representative-Constituent Relationships*

I begin by offering an analysis of various forms of the relationship between representative and constituents, in order to assess whether any of the *kinnars* were able to represent their constituents in the sense of speaking 'for' them. Jane Mansbridge (2003) discusses four normative forms of representation ('promissory', 'anticipatory', 'gyroscopic', and 'surrogate'), drawing upon empirical findings over the last twenty years regarding how American legislators relate to their constituents. Both the United States and India are federal systems with relatively strong state governments, and both have single-member constituencies, with simple-plurality, first-past-the-post electoral systems (Chhibber and Kollman 1998: 329). Mansbridge offers a theorisation of 'what constitutes "good" representation', arguing that the latter three forms she theorises supplement the traditional form of promissory representation and are not mutually exclusive forms but might interact over time with one another (2003: 526). I adopt Mansbridge's theorisations for the Indian context in order to assess whether *kinnar* candidates were able to perform as representatives.

'Promissory representation' is the traditional model of representation. It focuses on the idea that during campaigns, promises are made to constituents, which representatives then keep or fail to keep (2003: 515). The understanding of accountability here is that the representative is 'responsible to' or 'answerable to' those voters. The voter has power over the representative during their governing period (in line with the promises made), and the voter can reward or punish the representative during the time of the next election (the 'sanction'), according to the way they acted relating to promises made at the previous election (516). It has forward-looking intentionality and expresses a simple form of voter's power over the representative that results in accountability due to the impending sanction. While Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausli, and Kamla Bua were elected with a tidal wave of support, indicating their popularity as candidates, none of the three made tangible, specific promises to their constituents. They each claimed they would work for the 'development' of their localities, but campaigning focused primarily on presenting them as the opposite to professional politicians: what they were not, rather than what they would do. The premise of promissory representation is that candidates who failed to keep their promises are punished, but in each of the *kinnars'* cases, specific promises were not made, and there was no forward looking intentionality in the sense that *kinnars* would be elected again (after all, they were not politicians by profession).³⁵ If there was a

³⁵ Supporters and campaigners suggested that there was no chance that *kinnars* would be elected again. This was evident, perhaps not immediately after each victory, but certainly soon after when supporters realised *kinnars* were no more efficient than other politicians. In the case of Kamla Bua, for example, the Mayoral seat was reserved in the next election for a Scheduled Caste man, so Kamla Bua would not have been able to contest the seat; this was also the case in

chance of re-election, there might have been more accountability regarding their achievements.

A second form of representation is 'anticipatory': people often vote in a retrospective manner, looking back at the past behaviour of a representative to inform voting at the next election (2003: 516). The voter exercises power through potential punishment for broken promises, thus the representative is encouraged to try and please future voters (517). Mansbridge notes that the representative does not represent the voter at time of the previous election but at the time of the next election. The voter who controls the representative thus appears to be the voter of the future, and because the representative cannot predict a wide change of preferences, it may be important to consider how the representative can change the voters' mindsets and choices through education or manipulation (517-9). She writes that the promissory form of reputation puts little emphasis on communication, but in the anticipatory model, the incentive structure (where the focus is on the next election) has created 'an entire apparatus of opinion polling, focus group, and interest group activity' which increases the practice of good deliberation (520). Relating to Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausai, and Kamla Bua, there was no past performance to which voters could look. However, especially in the case of Kamla Bua's election, *kinnars* had been elected before, and perhaps voters looked to their political performance to serve as an example of a *kinnar* politician. Certainly interviewees in Sagar, and even in Shabnam's case in Shahdol, suggested that hearing positive information about Kamla helped to support their decisions. None of the three *kinnars* had any political experience, and none had much social presence in the sense they had undertaken social or charity work that might endear the voters to their personalities and commitment to each locality. At the same time, each was viewed primarily as a member of the *kinnar* community and not linked to past behaviour or performance of other politicians or parties. This worked in their favour: the past behaviour of other candidates helped to inform voters at each election of what they did not wish to see in the future. Voters thus acted in an anticipatory manner against past candidates.

A third form is 'gyroscopic' representation. Voters select representatives who act in ways approved by the voters but without external incentives: these representatives are not accountable in the traditional sense, since representatives are accountable only to their own beliefs and principles (2003: 520). People select their representatives according to their preferences to a single issue, or a broader approach, for example, commitment to the public good (521). The representative is seen as having similar policy preferences, being honest and principled, or sufficiently skilled (Fearon

Katni. In Shahdol, Shabnam contested a general seat, but in the following election, it was reserved for a member of the Scheduled Tribes. The implementation of rolling reservations in decentralised political bodies in India makes straightforward promissory representation between representatives and a particular constituency more complex.

1999: 68, cited by Mansbridge 2003: 521); Mansbridge notes that descriptive characteristics, along with party identification and indicators of character can also influence voters. Here the voters cannot influence the behaviour of the representatives, but their power is over the political system by selecting and placing in it a representative whose behaviour is, to some degree, predictable (521). The key in the voter-representative relationship is not accountability but predictability: the representative should act accountably to themselves or the political party to which they are connected (522). This form of representation seems pertinent to the cases of *kinnar* representatives. Each was assumed to be 'honest' and 'incorruptible' because they had no social ties and apparently nothing to gain from public office, apart from serving the people. Campaign rhetoric presented *kinnars* as principled, committed to the public good, and more likely to listen to people's needs, unlike professional politicians. This presentation reflects Mansbridge's argument that descriptive characteristics can influence voters: the presentation of *kinnars'* personalities helped to inform voters as to their future behaviour. However, Mansbridge notes that voters cannot influence representatives' behaviour, but that their behaviour should be predictable. In some ways, *kinnars* behaviour was predictable, since they could only achieve so much as independent candidates: their decisions had to be approved or supported by other politicians and were shaped by advisors.

The final form is that of 'surrogate representation'. The representative has no electoral relationship with their constituents but is a representative in another district (2003: 522). There is little accountability between constituent and representative, nor is there a power relation between both (523). However, this form of representation can be important for advancing substantive interests, for example, when the surrogate representative shares experiences with their surrogate constituency 'in a way that the majority of the legislature do not' (*ibid.*). Mansbridge gives the example that representatives who are 'female, African American, or of Polish ancestry, who have a child with a disability, or who have grown up on a farm, in a mining community, or in a working-class neighbourhood', not only feel particularly sensitive to issues in relation to these experiences but might also feel responsible for representing the interests and perspectives of these groups, even if it is only a minority of their constituents who share these experiences and interests (*ibid.*). While *kinnars* were elected who perhaps had little in common descriptively with their constituents, apart from experience of locality and frustration with local development, the presence of *kinnars* in deliberative and legislative bodies could be beneficial for *kinnars* in MP state as a whole; this argument has particular resonance for Shabnam Mausi as a Member of the state's Legislative Assembly rather than more localised bodies like Katni or Sagar's Municipal Corporation. Shabnam, who identified (on some occasions) as a member of the Brahmin caste, or as a member of the Scheduled Tribes, might be seen as able to

represent their substantive interests given that she shares a common identity and experiences with those communities.

A further consideration, which might occur in any of the forms of representation theorised by Mansbridge (although less possible in surrogate representation), is the relationship that is developed between representative and constituents in terms of accountability. Anne Phillips discusses approaches used by women's organisations that ensure the accountability of representatives and institutions to heterogeneous voices (1991).³⁶ She focuses on issues of deliberation and participation, in order to make representatives and institutions more accountable to constituents, notably women. Approaches such as holding continual meetings post-election with representatives and encouraging informal participation and feedback for elected representatives might function to encourage disadvantaged groups to enter the democratic sphere, since the process of encouraging deliberation and participation—especially among women—is significant.³⁷ Post-election meetings and informal discussions with *kinnars* were one way in which *kinnars* were accountable to their constituents, especially for Kamla Bua and Kamla Jaan in municipal bodies: people could meet with them and express their demands. It was noted by interviewees that one lasting impression was that *kinnars* were more approachable than other politicians, or more available to meet with constituents, ensuring some level of accountability once in office.

ii. *Failure to Represent and Reifying Marginality*

In this final section, I turn to examine the extent to which *kinnar* politicians might be said to be representative of their constituents. The case of *kinnars*' 'representation' (in the sense of political proxy) is interesting, as highlighted by the discussion in relation

³⁶ Phillips notes that 'truly representative democracy needs the presence of heterogeneous voices', referring to research on meetings in a Vermont town, arguing that who 'find the time, energy, commitment and confidence' to attend are not a representative group (1991: 141). She argues that meeting based democracy in this case was biased in favour of men (*ibid.*: 142), given the restrictions on women's time, including time and childcare constraints. In addition, there might be an assumption that heterogeneous voices refers to multiple people: that a single person, as a 'voice', is homogenous to itself. In the case of *kinnars*, it might be useful to identify the heterogeneity inherent in a singular voice, as eloquently noted by Spivak in the 'knottings and configurations' of the 'identity' strands that produce the 'subaltern subject-effect' (1985: 341).

³⁷ Phillips points to multiple constraints on women's time, arguing that active participatory democracy can fight subordination and isolation or home seclusion (1991: 161; 143); moreover discussion, deliberation, and the presence of heterogeneous voices helps women to develop their ideas and make decisions (*ibid.*: 142; 164). Phillips discusses one approach to deal with isolation as 'computer democracy', a means by which more women, trapped in the seclusion of the home, might participate more actively (1991: 143-4). There are critiques of such participation, especially as a type of referendum democracy, which makes majority rule absolute through single and self-contained decisions, and could remove the protection that currently exists for minorities through negotiations, trade-offs, and coalitions, where minorities can ensure some benefits, even if they are outvoted in numerical terms (Sartori 1987).

to the four styles of representation above. Arguably, *kinnars* did not 'represent' their constituents in any of the particular ways theorised by Mansbridge, although she does argue that the three latter forms (anticipatory, gyroscopic, and surrogate) supplement promissory representation, are not mutually exclusive, and might overlap and interact over time with one another (2003: 526). While *kinnars* fulfilled various aspects of representing their constituents in relation to the forms of representation theorised by Mansbridge, particularly regarding gyroscopic representation, in my view they were not able to fill normative promissory or anticipatory roles as representatives since they were not professional politicians who had political experience, nor was there the obvious option that they would be elected again. *Kinnars'* entry into politics was based upon a re-presentation of each as an ideal candidate or alternative in a particular context, bringing into the political sphere the very aspects of their identities that characterised them as marginalised in the social sphere. These attributes identified them as outside of normative social structures and society at the moment they sought a central role in mainstream society, creating a negative subject position that could be filled with a variety of identifications in order to suit the public's needs. The negative subject position created served to reify their marginality, so that representation failed to ensure *kinnar* participation and inclusion by maintaining their marginality in relation to mainstream society.

Mansbridge argues that descriptive representation may not necessarily mean that the representative and constituents must have the same outward manifestations of identity, but rather that shared experiences and shared regional location might also be important in defining the relationship between representative and constituent and how the former might be able to 'represent' the latter (1999: 629). *Kinnars* did not share the same outward manifestations of identity as the majority of their constituents: not belonging to traditional caste groups or social networks, *kinnars* were seen as outside of mainstream society and faced discrimination and ostracisation in their daily lives. Ostensibly, *kinnars'* lifestyles and experiences were distinct from the lives of the mainstream public, and, in many ways, did not seem to share experiences and common interests with people in the wider locality in which they lived. They did share the same regional location, but this was not sufficient to explain their electoral victories, given that *kinnars* had not been elected in the past and were not persuaded to run in future elections. The wide base of popular support that *kinnars* gained is an indication that traditional representatives had failed in some significant manner; the anger and disillusion with mainstream politicians was an important factor in securing the victory of *kinnar* candidates.

The elections of *kinnars* in MP do not suggest that *kinnars* were representative of the *kinnar* community, nor that they were representative of their local constituencies, at least in a descriptive sense. There are no shared, singular descriptive elements which

can be attributed as the reason behind their electoral victories, such as shared caste, class, gender, or social identities with their constituents. However, a discussion regarding promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic, and surrogate forms of representation suggests that some semblance of representative relationships were formed between *kinnars* and their constituents, alongside a semblance of accountability. A representative relationship occurred particularly in relation to anticipatory representation, where previous politicians were punished for broken promises and ineffective leadership, and gyroscopic representation, where *kinnars* were chosen due to a perceived general commitment to the public good (where previous politicians had failed) and where their descriptive characteristics, such as ‘honesty’, ‘incorruptibility’, and lack of family were taken into account by voters. These two forms of representation enhance an understanding of the relationship that was developed between *kinnars* and their constituents during the electoral campaigns and are helpful in theorising, in part, the reasons for their elections.

More importantly Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua’s elections can be read as ‘representative’ of public anger and disillusion. They were elected in each locality as a result of protest voting. Journalist Ajit Mishra read Shabnam’s victory as a consequence of ‘negative voting’, where people voted against, rather than specifically for, a candidate. The campaigns and candidacies of the three *kinnar* politicians might be interpreted as the defeat of other politicians, rather than the success of *kinnars*. People voted for *kinnars* because they represented (in both senses of the term) nothing, rather than something, indeed, the identity ‘*kinnar*’ served as an empty signifier.³⁸ Yadav points to the capacity of electoral politics to ‘forge social identities’: constituents in each locality formed ‘explicit political coalitions’ of various social identities (2010: 355). In each case, coalitions were formed to express a response concerning the state of politics in each locality. Anger and frustration at local politicians found a suitable vehicle in the candidacy of each *kinnar*. The phrase, ‘why elect a “fake” *kinnar* when a “real” one will do?’ betrays this sentiment: *kinnars* were an alternative choice, but only by being equated with the real version of the worst politician possible. Shared perceptions and reactions influenced voters to make a radical but uniform choice in electing a candidate who was seen as completely different to those who had come before.

Even the phrases I have utilised—negative voting, ‘representing nothing’, a ‘real’ *kinnar*, and a ‘completely different’ candidate—indicate how the public viewed these candidates and their elections. *Kinnars*’ identities were constructed in negative

³⁸ However, the occurrence of *kinnars*’ elections and actions in office then filled the signifier ‘*kinnar*’ with new content, such that it would inform future representation of that signifier. Future representation of ‘*kinnar*’ political identity would be informed by past experience, so that anticipatory representation might play a prominent role for future candidates. Such an occurrence can be demonstrated by the influence of Kamla Jaan’s election upon other electoral victories in MP, including Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua’s, particularly in terms of media representation and its influence on other localities.

terms and they were not seen as 'real' representatives or politicians but only 'real' *kinnars*, elected in order to make a point against 'real' politicians. Occasionally I would refer to Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, or Kamla Bua as 'politicians'. I was often told, categorically, that they were not politicians, revealing that even after or during tenure in public office, none of the *kinnars* were seen as politicians, but only as substitutes for real politicians. Thus, the nomination of each *kinnar* as a political candidate lent itself to the public need as a symbol, a cipher for voters' frustration. The identity category 'kinnar' came to be manipulated due to its presumed fluid nature and a lack of knowledge about the community. People placed upon *kinnar* identity a variety of identities in order to appeal to different groups and it became an identity in which people could reflect their own needs and desires or impose their protest.

In all three cases, *kinnars* were representative to the extent that they expressed the needs of the voting public in a particular time and location, but were unable to be 'representative' in ways that were identifiable in a descriptive or substantive sense. Instead, as I have argued, their identity was represented in the political sphere as one which embodied 'lack' since *kinnars* could not be identified as belonging to a particular gender, caste, class, or religion, or as having a particular, identifiable kinship group akin to normative social networks. In this regard, they did not 'represent' any group. The process of conceiving of *kinnar* identity as one which represented nothing, rather than something, was instrumental in presenting *kinnar* identity as appealing to voters and constructing their identity as intelligible in relation to discourses surrounding the pre-constructed social categories to which people belong. The potential for *kinnars'* political representation was based upon aspects that were associated with their marginality, their 'lack' of recognisable identity. This process marginalised *kinnar* identity in the political sphere, despite the normative assumption that the representation of minority groups ensures greater levels of participation and inclusion. I return to this question in Chapter Five, questioning the extent to which participation and representation within Indian LGBT activism has been beneficial for *kinnar* identity. I argue that representation in the sphere of activism has also served to marginalise particular members of the *hijra* community, by positing a specific form of *hijra* identity as normative. In the following chapter, I analyse how *kinnars'* participation in politics might be theorised as either proof or a mockery of democracy, and the extent to which *kinnars* have gained, either symbolically or materially, from political participation.

In regards to the practice of representation, I have argued that *kinnar* identity was re-constructed and represented in order to make their identity understandable and appealing to the voting public. Spivak is concerned with how representation functions to name the subaltern: in a similar fashion, *kinnars* were 'named' through the practice of representation, made narrativisable within and referring to preconceived modes of interpretation and social knowledge. Representation in the political sphere thus

obscured non-narrativisable aspects of *kinnar* identity, particularly regarding the forms of society in which these *kinnars* were situated and the heterogeneous identifications that these *kinnars* made in constructing a sense of identity. Such a process was necessary in rendering *kinnar* identity intelligible.

Chapter Four

The Symbolic and Material Benefits of Political Participation

In this chapter, I investigate three ways in which *kinnars*' political participation might be interpreted. First, stories of electoral 'success' for *kinnars* might be seen as a 'symbolic' victory for marginal groups and could be read as a proof of the workings of decentralised 'democracy'. In this interpretation, the successful contestation of political office by subordinate individuals is a testament to the opportunity that decentralised democracy creates for all members of society, despite a lack of social status or political qualifications. There might be symbolic, expressive, or educative value in electing *kinnars* to public office, as an end in itself (symbolic), to include different interests into deliberative debate (expressive), or to educate other members in political institutions as to the value of marginalised voices and change the terms of the debate (educative). In an alternative reading, these elections might be interpreted as a mockery of the democratic process. If elections are the only way in which individuals can exercise their democratic right, then the election of a *kinnar* as a representative is a mockery of the political system, where *kinnars* have no experience of politics, are perceived as 'incompetent', and struggle to achieve anything for their constituents. Voting for *kinnars* was thus a deliberate action against professional politicians. A third interpretation posits these elections as unable to provide any real 'gain', symbolic or material, for the elected *kinnars*. This reading is not incompatible with either of the two interpretations above. I argue that the possibility of representation in state and municipal political bodies did not result in material gains, affecting economic or social status for the individual *kinnars* or their communities. I theorise *kinnars* lack of material gains using Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations of capital, exploring the level of *kinnars*' economic, cultural, and social capital when they contested elections and analysing why *kinnars* were not able to increase their symbolic capital once in office.

I. 'Symbolic' Representation: A Proof of Democracy

The successful contestation of elections by *kinnars* might be interpreted as a proof of decentralised democracy. There are three possible values of *kinnars*' representation: (1) symbolic, where representation is an important end in and of itself, (2) expressive, where preferences are translated into public policy, and (3) educative, where the presence of minorities has a didactic effect on other members within political institutions or other non-beneficiary (but similar status) groups. The presence of minority voices is an important end under all three functions, presenting an

opportunity to change the terms of the debate and policy formation in order to include different interests, fulfilling the deliberative function of democracy.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the pitfalls of representation for marginalised groups under preferential policies, including formally institutionalising marginal identity by conceiving of identity in essentialist (caste-based) terms and providing incentives for groups to identify in particular ways to become or retain beneficiary status. However, preferential policies have been expanded continually in the Indian context, based on the presumption that representation in educational and political institutions and the civil service has the capacity to benefit previously marginalised groups. Above all, the voices and interests of marginalised groups are seen as beneficial to the polity and debate. Mansbridge advocates the benefits of descriptive representation of marginalised groups in contexts of historical 'inability' to rule and *de facto* legitimacy (1999: 628), to recognise the importance of their voices. Their presence also forces opponents in deliberative bodies to 'formulate their arguments in terms that are reasonable to others' (Williams 1995: 87), changing the nature of deliberative arguments and forums. She writes that it is sensible to 'structure our decision-making process such that people can at least challenge each other's partiality' (*ibid.*), recognising that there are often other interests that are not always considered in legislative formation. The presence of minorities ensures a wider range of deliberative action by forcing those present to reform their own position and partiality. In support of the symbolic value of representation, Williams notes that simply increasing the numbers of representatives of marginalised groups in a deliberative body can change the dynamics of decision-making. Thus the way in which deliberation occurs is significant, even if it does not have a direct, substantive impact on the policy that is formulated. The presence of individuals from minority groups increases recognition and sensitivity to their concerns, as well as appreciation and respect for their presence and perhaps for the group more generally (*ibid.*). These arguments address the symbolic, expressive, and educative gains that occur through the representation of minority groups, in turn, strengthening certain functions of democracy such as deliberation and an increased sensitivity to minority interests. They run parallel to a deepening of participatory democracy and indicate how decentralised democracy has been effective in including minority groups and recognising their separate interests. As Pitkin writes,

we show a government to be representative not by demonstrating its control over its subjects but just the reverse, by demonstrating that its subjects have control over what it does...a representative government must not merely be in control, not merely promote the public interest, but must also be responsive to the people.

(1972: 232).

i. *The Importance of Voting*

Governments and politicians must be responsive to voters, at least in some way as bodies that are formed through constituents' voting patterns. As Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer note, relating to the act of campaigning, politicians must meet voters on 'equal or subservient terms', which is an 'inversion of power from the hands of the politicians back to the hands of the voters' (1986: 947). Given the enthusiasm behind voting in India, with impressive and increasing levels of turnout, especially in local and state elections, and among underprivileged groups who are often the staunchest supporters of elections, Mukulika Banerjee turns to the important question of why local populations vote and what it means (2007). She contends that elections might be interpreted as 'sacred' in India, where the vote has both symbolic power (expressing self-respect and –worth) and instrumental power (in warding off attacks by the state upon self-worth). Banerjee asks why disadvantaged groups in India are the most committed to democracy and participation in elections,¹ despite the lack of material improvement or advancement of voter's interests (1559) as rational choice theory might suggest (1556). She argues that voting is seen as the duty of all responsible citizens and is an 'expression' of citizenship, which contributes to clear-cut election results (1560). She states that the 'egalitarian mechanics of the poll' provide particular pleasure for voters, as a unique event in which equality is brought to life (1560-61). The vote is seen as a weapon, compelling governments to display a basic concern for voters' interests. Ultimately, people vote because elections have become 'as much an end in themselves, as a means to a better society' (1561).

Banerjee's article, which presents fieldwork from several elections in two villages in West Bengal, is a compelling account that addresses Hauser and Singer's statement that it is not enough to understand an election merely in terms of who won, by how many votes, and with what support. They argue that this information tells us very little about the process by which such results were achieved, writing that 'it is centrally important to know what the vote means to the individuals who cast it and to the society that organizes its political culture around it' (1986: 942). I have explored in the previous chapter the reasons behind people's choice of vote in each locality, considering wider social mindsets and personal descriptive interests, and I now turn to address whether it is possible to read *kinnars'* elections as a proof of democracy, addressing the initial assessment of their surprising victories in MP by newspapers and voters alike.

¹ Banerjee points out that the expectation and academic theorisation that turnout is lower among citizens at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum is not found to be the case in India, where a 'poor, lower caste person is more likely to vote here than an upper-caste, upper-class person' (2007: 1556). See Yadav 2010: 354.

According to Banerjee, the vote has both symbolic and instrumental power. People voted to express their self-worth and demonstrated that they (at least, in these particular elections in Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar) held the power over who would win. *Kinnars* won against all odds, beating professional politicians with surprising margins. Local and national newspapers published immediately after each victory declared that each victory was a proof of decentralised democracy in India, where local constituents were in control of government. Local constituencies ‘celebrated democracy’ (Ramachandran 2000) and these elections were no ‘laughing matter’ (Sharma 2000). Newspaper headlines heralded the elections as a ‘pox on politicians’ (Bearak 2001) and as the ‘revenge of the people’ (Ramchandran 2000) against incompetent politicians, explaining that *kinnars* were expected to work ‘more sincerely’ than their predecessors (*Indian Express* 2000). Journalists expressed the view that it was voters’ anger that had driven these elections, using ‘the ballot box to send a very strong message’ (Ramachandran 2000). Moreover, the elections were seen as good for *kinnars*. *Kinnars* were said to be marching ahead, from ‘zero to hero’ (Jain 2001), occupying the ‘centre stage in Madhya Pradesh politics’ (Sharma 2000). Sheetal Jain, a reporter for Bhopal edition of *NavBharat* argued that this ‘unprecedented electoral success’ would ‘open the door for active participation in democracy’, so that *kinnars* would ‘overcome social apathy’, alongside teaching a lesson to other politicians (Jain 2001). The elections were seen as proclaiming a new era in Indian politics, for both *kinnars* and the mainstream public. As well as being a ‘new chapter of enfranchisement in the history of India’s eunuchs’ (Jacinto 2000), the elections symbolised a ‘brighter future’, offering ‘hope for many’ (*ibid.*). While it would be too much ‘to expect that illiterate eunuchs to [sic] undo what “clever” politicians have done over the years’, it ‘definitely signals a positive turn for our woebegone democracy’ (Mishra 2000).

Such triumphant language celebrated *kinnars’* elections but none of the *kinnar’s* time in office would generate the same strength of emotion immediately evident in the days and weeks after their elections. The proof of democracy was that voters had elected their own representative, rejecting mainstream politicians and political parties.

ii. *Marginality, Silencing, and Lack of Self-Presentation*

An assessment that *kinnars’* elections were a ‘proof’ of democracy becomes untenable given *kinnars* were evaluated as no more successful than previously elected male and female politicians. This is demonstrated by the case studies I presented in Chapter Two, where *kinnars’* initial popularity diminished through an assessment of their tenures as unsuccessful. News interest and constituency support fell away, two of the three *kinnars* were unseated, and none of the three was asked, or successfully able, to contest another election. Certainly, *kinnars’* elections indicate that the voting public control

democratic processes in the sense that the majority of each constituency voted for and secured a *kinnar* victory. However, I want to address the symbolic, expressive, and educative value of their elections so that the phrase ‘proof of democracy’ has further implications than a simple formula where the winner is a proof that direct elections work by amassing the most votes.

The entry of minority groups into the democratic institutions deepens the practice of democracy through symbolic, expressive, and educative functions. First, it might change the dynamics of decision-making and this sort of deliberation is significant, even if it does not impact policy. Second, the inclusion of minority groups widens the scale of interests represented and might force a reconceptualisation of the terms and the nature of deliberative forums and arguments. Third, it ensures that subjects have control over democracy, and that their representatives and government are responsible to them. In regards to the first aspect, the presence of *kinnars* did force individuals in both local and state governments to work with *kinnars*, especially those involved in the day-to-day running of the Municipal Corporation or the MP Assembly in Shabnam’s case. Individuals were forced to address their assumptions about *kinnars* in order to ensure they could have a working relationship with them, and many people in the Corporations or MP Assembly did advise or work with the *kinnars* regarding common interests for development of each locality, learning how to treat them with respect and listen to their concerns. This may have had an impact on deliberation and the dynamics of decision-making and thus there may have been a didactic effect of *kinnars’* participation. Interviewees in the Municipal Corporations, for example, were often sympathetic to *kinnars* and did have to change their behaviour as a result of learning how to work with them. However in regard to the second two aspects, the case studies demonstrate that *kinnars’* presence in local bodies did not change the nature of deliberative forums, given that the government institutions functioned in much the same manner as before, where each *kinnar* was expected to fit in and conduct themselves in a way appropriate with that forum. Moreover, the scale of interests represented did not necessarily increase, given that none of the *kinnars* had an explicit agenda in relation to the *kinnar* community and their locality or represented interests that were only pertinent to the *kinnar* community and not other constituency groups. *Kinnars*, like other representatives, were expected to represent their constituencies and their interests, functioning as a representative from any other social group might have done.

Further, the way in which *kinnars* were represented as marginalised individuals who failed to represent their constituencies, as discussed in the previous chapter, is another reason to suggest that their elections were not a proof of democracy. *Kinnars* entered mainstream political institutions but were unable to serve as descriptive representatives to their constituents. In each locality, the elected *kinnar* was represented

as someone who was outside of mainstream society, someone who could be spoken for, and someone who could be represented in whatever way the public wanted. I elaborate on these three issues below, to argue that such a representation was not commensurate with an assessment of their representation as having symbolic, expressive, or didactic value.

First, *kinnars* were repeatedly presented as marginal to mainstream society and these characteristics were portrayed as making them more likely to be effective political candidates. Their marginality was made a central focus of political rhetoric to prove their ability to serve because they would not be corrupt or nepotistic, since they lacked normative social bonds. Thus, entry into politics was not intended to rectify their marginality: in fact their marginality had to be maintained because it was the very basis on which *kinnar* identity had been renegotiated in order to present them as potentially good electoral candidates. Each *kinnar* maintained the marginal position from which they had come while in office. Although they were treated as any other politician from a subordinate community might have been, they had entered politics as individuals whose marginality was the core facet of their identity. *Kinnars* thus symbolised, and maintained, marginality rather than being representative of their constituencies. Symbolically, therefore, they did not represent a proof of democracy because their elections were set up as a joke, rather than to prove someone could be elected because of their merits.

Second, *kinnars* were often silent or silenced through their campaigns and during their time in office, limiting the expressive effect that participation might have. For each *kinnar*, a significant aspect of the way they were brought into politics has to do with the issue of silence. Although each held a place of importance within the *kinnar* community, status in the sphere of their own community did not give them the status to speak in the political sphere, or at least speak credibly. Their identity as *kinnars*, albeit as significant members of their communities, was unintelligible to the mainstream public. It was thus their campaigners and supporters, who were members of mainstream society, who spoke for them, explaining who they were and what they would do if elected. 'Speaking for' also extended to the multiple communities they could represent: different communities could decide what they stood for and represented. There was no referent to which *kinnar* identity referred—caste, kinship, religion—making *kinnar* identity appeal to and represent various groups and their interests. Thus the political identity '*kinnar*' became an 'empty signifier', a signifier without a signified (Laclau 2007: 36). Laclau argues that this is not to say that the signifier has multiple signifieds to which it might be attached ('equivocal') or that it is 'ambiguous', in which an overdetermination or underdetermination of signifieds prevents it from being fixed (*ibid.*). Rather, the 'empty signifier' introduces the theoretical possibility of something that points, within the process of signification, to

the discursive presence of its own limits (*ibid.*). He writes that ‘if what we are talking about are the limits of the *signifying system*, it is clear that those limits cannot be themselves signified, but have to *show* themselves as the *interruption* or *breakdown* of the process of signification (37). The being or institution represented through the empty signifier is ‘constitutively unreachable’ (39), as an ‘impossible object’ which shows itself ‘through the impossibility of its adequate representation’ (40). It thus follows that the identity term ‘*kinnar*’ was represented as not referring to any particular social identification and was an identity which could not be represented adequately, a signifier in which people presented their own objectives and projected their own desires and meanings by speaking on each *kinnars*’ behalf. More significantly, the term ‘*kinnar*’ pointed to the unreachable limit of the process of signification, where the object—*kinnar* identity—could not be represented adequately.

Even when *kinnars* did speak for themselves, or on the rare occasions for their communities, their voices were subsumed by larger issues and into a more general agenda. Kamla Jaan was literally silent during the campaigns and was spoken for by local campaigners who manufactured her campaign for the needs of the wider community. In office, her advisors were there for every decision. However she was not necessarily compliant: certain instances point to her attempts to be heard and make her own interests known, such as finding ways to test those around her. Although Shabnam Mausi and Kamla Bua, on the other hand, were more vocal in their participation, the issue of silence and silencing can nonetheless be demonstrated in their cases. Both said they had joined politics on behalf of local needs, although both also stressed the importance of equal rights for the *kinnar* community and their equal desire to enter politics (Kamla Bua’s assertion was always stronger). At the same time, these self-described interests were subsumed by mass interests in order to generate a larger support base and ultimately, more votes. Although explicitly campaigning on issues regarding *kinnar* rights, for example, Kamla Bua’s campaign evolved into representing a variety of groups and their interests. In this sense, even self-motivated *kinnar* interests became secondary to other causes and interests, silencing their voices.

A third issue is that of self-presentation, or re-presentation. In the previous chapter, I argued that *kinnars*’ identity was re-presented in relation to gender, caste, religion, and community, contending that a lack of social ties became a significant element in presenting *kinnars* as viable candidates for public office. *Kinnar* identity was constructed in such a way that they were not representative of their constituents, but became a vessel through which various groups could express discontent. A focus on campaign rhetoric and other modes in which the re-presentation occurred indicates that there is very little evidence to show that there was an active self-presentation of their identity by *kinnars* themselves, aside from that which would bolster their support by feeding off mainstream narratives (for instance, arguing that they would treat their

constituents as family was part of the greater rhetorical allusion that *kinnars* had no kin and thus were self-sacrificing). What did occur was a significant negotiation of characteristics and traits that were stereotypes of or associated with *kinnar* identity, by both local campaigners and voters, presenting *kinnars* as suitable candidates with social identities that were made intelligible to the mainstream public.

These issues do not suggest that *kinnars* were considered 'worthy' candidates to represent the general public, but rather that their identity, as marginal and 'unfixed', lent itself to manipulation, to being 'misused', in public rhetoric and modes of representation. Given that *kinnars* were not portrayed as representing 'actual' *kinnars* or their constituents, symbolically they did not represent anyone in particular, apart from being a mockery of professional politicians. It becomes untenable to argue that *kinnars'* elections had symbolic, expressive, or educative effects, given the way in which *kinnar* identity was represented in the political sphere, and thus cannot be a proof of democracy for two reasons. First, it was not the case that simply any individual could be elected from a minority group. These elections were the product of a set of specific conditions, where *kinnar* identity, perceived as a fluid social identity, was manipulated to appeal to voters. Second, there were few positive effects in symbolic, expressive, or educative terms. The presence of *kinnars* in democratic institutions was not celebrated as an end in and of itself. Additionally, their presence did not translate specific community interests or preferences into policy, nor did it change, in any substantial way, the functions of political bodies, nor the terms of deliberative discussion. Therefore, their elections cannot be read as simply a 'proof' of democracy.

II. 'Anyone' Can Be Elected: Making a Mockery of Democracy

A second interpretation regarding the representation of individuals from marginalised is as a 'mockery' of democracy, given that 'anyone' can be elected, despite a lack of qualifications, experience, or ability to represent their constituencies (conceiving of representation as promissory). Many individuals described the elections in Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar as a 'joke' after the event, because *kinnars* were seen as unfit representatives through a lack of political experience or education and did not make any significant headway once in office. *Kinnars* represented public anger and frustration, and because they were perceived as unable to perform well in politics, they were used to make a mockery of the democratic process.

i. *Voting Rationally and Mocking the System*

Elections and voting are recognised as a significant feature of decentralised democracy; the process of voting itself is almost synonymous with 'democracy' given people's emotional response towards to the process of voting (Banerjee 2007). Due to the decentralisation of power within various political institutions from state and local level, many social actors have come to view elections as a way to gain access to the State and to goods. Kanchan Chandra describes how elections are viewed as an 'auction' of access to goods, with the potential to gain alleviation from one's inherited status (2004b). Electoral success is associated with access to power and material gain and is deeply coveted. It is in the interests of various groups to gain access, through a group representative, to resources through political office or to influence policy that is beneficial to the group (see Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004b). Therefore, voting behaviour is often based around collective action in order to secure such access. Elections and voting are influenced by individual and group identity, along caste, class, and occasionally gender lines, ensuring that candidates are 'representative' of their constituents, and that the group has access to resources through the positioning of that representative.

Hanna Pitkin describes voting as 'essentially a group experience' (1972: 223). She writes that 'we vote, indeed we perceive political reality, through the people with whom we are in contact' (*ibid.*). Although Pitkin's argument might be updated to take into account the various forms of social media in which political reality is described to the masses, perceptions are shaped by other people and our reactions to them and their reactions to us. Many people 'with whom we are in contact' may not share similar descriptive characteristics, such as the same outward manifestations of identity, but are likely, in many respects, to share similar viewpoints and experiences, especially in political localities, such as Katni, Shahdol, or Sagar. These commonalities shape perceptions and political views. This sort of collective reasoning might help to explain why *kinnars'* campaigns were so successful. People shared similar experiences and localities, including knowledge of the political landscape. Thus, 'what the public thinks or does must (in theory) be translatable into the behaviour or attitudes of individuals...[E]ven if most people vote in an irrational and uninformed response to primary group pressures, this does not preclude the system as a whole from displaying a degree of "rational" response' (Pitkin 1972: 224). Such a 'rational response' could be the election of someone seen to be unsuitable, like a *kinnar*, in the sense that their election is an expression or representative of, the response of the public to certain issues: lack of choice among badly nominated political candidates, or anger at the state political parties. Pitkin argues that 'representation may emerge from a political system in which many individuals, both voters and legislators, are pursuing quite other goals'

(*ibid.*). By this reasoning, *kinnars* became representatives as a result of quite other constituent goals: not securing representation for *kinnars*, but due to the public's desire to punish professional politicians. This was a rational outcome, even though people voted in an 'irrational' way.

Although *kinnars'* elections might prove that the system works because they gained the majority of votes, their election simultaneously mocked the system because they were unqualified candidates who could not perform their roles effectively. People voted for them because there were no other options; casting a vote for a *kinnar* candidate was considered as casting a 'negative' vote, reflecting campaign rhetoric regarding real '*hijra*' politicians. Voting for a *kinnar* was voting for a 'real' *kinnar*, where *kinnar* identity was associated with impotence and incompetence.

There is a further reason why such elections were a mockery of the democratic process. Both Kamla Jaan and Kamla Bua were unseated for contesting a seat reserved for a category to which they were judged not to belong. Following the 2011 judgment against Kamla Bua, Gwalior-based Professor Ayub Khan argued that the court had failed to address the basic issue regarding what category *kinnars* belonged to and therefore what seats they could contest in elections (*Indian Express* 2012). Since *kinnars* had been democratically elected, their election 'should be honoured in a democracy more than anything else' (*ibid.*); moreover, it was pointless nullifying the polls since people knew that they are voting 'for a eunuch'. In the same article, Bhopal-based Professor Gyanendra Gautam agreed with Khan. He said that since the Constitution has given voting rights to *kinnars*, the court should decide what seats they could contest and remove the ambiguity. It is significant that Khan stresses the democratic nature of the election: this is a further reason to consider these elections as a mockery of the process. Adhering blindly to reservation policy produced the result that democratically elected individuals from marginalised communities were unseated. This is against the 'spirit' of affirmative action schemes, where reservation, because it has formally institutionalised certain groups as worthy of benefits and not others, benefits a Scheduled Caste woman, but not a caste-less *kinnar*. Kamla Bua's removal from office confirms that only certain group identities benefit from reservation policies, but not other marginalised groups who face similar, or even worse, economic and social disadvantage.² It distracts, McMillan argues, from the 'broader promotion of socio-economic egalitarianism' by focusing the debate on issues of group identity and preferential programmes rather than actual group needs (2005: 315).

In order to explore further the mocking aspect of these elections, I want to examine how many constituents in each locality conceptualised their experience of *kinnars'* tenure as a 'failed experiment'. This retrospective analysis of *kinnars'* political

² One might argue that *kinnars* are more marginalised than women, and that belonging to no identifiable caste group puts them in a worse position than belonging to a caste group since caste is the criterion for identifying beneficiaries of affirmative action schemes in India.

participation lends itself to the idea that their time in politics was a mockery of democracy, by demonstrating how the democratic system was unable to recognise their positioning (as *kinnars* and as elected officials) and the ways in which the public had already acknowledged the failure of contemporary democratic processes in meeting their needs.

ii. *Joke to Popular Revolt to Failed Experiment*

By the end of each of their tenures, none of the *kinnars* was judged to be more effective or successful in office than previously elected professional politicians. From the start, the notion of a *kinnar* contesting political office was considered a joke. Although *kinnars* were not seen as particularly promising candidates, their campaigns were extremely popular, resulting in significant victories. However, initial support dissipated and people began to view *kinnar* candidates in a similar way to previously elected politicians. Even at the time of their elections, people assumed they would not achieve much in office, due to their lack of qualifications, experience, education, and party support. This sentiment evidently contradicted the rhetoric that they would make 'better' politicians, in terms of assumed incorruptibility and selflessness. Curiously, people hoped they would be better than other politicians, with little evidence to suggest that this would be the case. Somewhat contradictorily, there was both a feeling of hope and hopelessness at the time of the elections in 1999/2000 and 2009, an argument that further supports an interpretation of *kinnars'* elections as a mockery of the democratic process. On their whole, each *kinnar's* tenure was judged to be unremarkable or unsuccessful and thus was deemed a 'failed experiment'.

News of a *kinnar* fighting an election was immediately interpreted as a 'joke'. How could anyone expect a *kinnar* to win or have a job in politics? The immediate reaction reflects how *kinnars* were seen in mainstream society: as ostracised figures, figuratively and literally. People did not believe that they would or could contest an election and news of their campaigns was taken in a lighthearted manner. In addition, these campaigns were engineered to humiliate local politicians. 'Real' politicians' incompetence was made the subject of people's derision through the election of a 'real' *kinnar*. In each case, the public, local journalists, and politicians did not take the campaigns seriously until it became evident that each individual would win (Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11; Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11; Mishra Interview, 4/4/11). Behind the façade of a lighthearted campaign was a serious message: constituents wanted and would support a 'real' candidate, instead of 'fake *kinnar*' politicians.³

³ Local people did however worry how others might perceive them: in Sagar, people worried that their image would become 'distorted' due to their support of a *kinnar*. As Sudesh Tiwari stated, people 'looking at Sagar from other places simply think the people of Sagar are stupid

Two issues are revealed through the view that (potential) *kinnar* politicians were a joke. First, *kinnars* are assumed to have nothing to offer society due to their lack of social position in mainstream society. Second, an initial understanding of such campaigns as a joke reveals their 'disposability' by mainstream society. When asked how Shabnam Mausi could win an election from a district to which she did not belong, journalist Ajit Mishra said, 'there was nothing to lose...and everything to gain. After all, she was not afraid to lose her image or her money; she was afraid of nothing' (Interview, 4/4/11). Shabnam, like other *kinnar* candidates, was perceived as a misfit within society, and had little to lose by seeking public office. Sadly, an attempt to be recognised and accepted by the mainstream public was read as a 'joke'. The statement that Shabnam had nothing to lose politically, but also socially, suggests that her defeat and potential humiliation would not affect her due to her low status in society. It may have been a joke to the public, but it was no joke to the *kinnars* who contested the elections who believed they were doing something important and meaningful for the people who supported their campaigns. They did not, moreover, seem to have been 'in' on the joke and were not aware, or at least, did not admit to being aware, of the social reading that their attempt to be elected was a 'joke'. They believed they were doing the right thing in contesting elections, encouraged as they were by potential voters. However, a staunch belief that they were doing the right thing could have been maintained in order to retain a sense of dignity, even if individuals became aware that this is what the public thought. *Kinnars* did seem to be aware that they were ridiculed figures according to most social discourses, but did not admit in interviews that they were aware of this mockery in relation to their political participation, instead choosing to portray themselves as candidates who the public really did want and support.

As the campaigns grew, a description of each as 'popular revolts' became commonplace. Above, I noted that journalist Mr Singh said that although people could not read or write, they were still 'literate' in terms of life experience. He explained that people supported these campaigns because they knew what they wanted: to send a clear-cut message to local politicians about their failure (Interview, 28/1/11). Independent *kinnars* candidates represented an alternative choice and this was the reason for their popularity. People gave donations and support to each candidate, providing campaign materials and spreading news of the campaign. *Kinnars* were unable to run expensive campaigns and hold large rallies, like candidates nominated by the BJP and Congress,⁴ instead campaigning door-to-door and generating support

enough to vote for a *kinnar*'. He assessed that Sagar's reputation was damaged by this election (Interview, 28/2/11).

⁴ Many professional politicians have greater resources at their disposal, including access to resources through support from a political party. There is a limit set by the Seventy-Fourth Amendment Act (1992) on the amount to be spent on a campaign in Urban Local Bodies, and each candidate must submit a budget along with their nomination which outlines the

through word of mouth. There was little planning involved in organising the campaigns (Kosta Interview 22/2/11; Chanchal Interview 5/3/11). At the same time, the campaigns were outwardly popular among lower-caste and –class groups, and also generated invisible support among middle- and upper-class members of society, since people were ashamed to support a *kinnar* candidate openly (Chanchal Interview, 5/3/11). Both this ‘political undercurrent’ (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11) among middle- and upper-class voters, alongside clear support among the lower-classes, garnered mass support throughout each locality, generating a popular revolt against professional politicians and established parties.

A further aspect to the notion of a ‘popular revolt’ was that support for these candidates was seen as part of a social ‘experiment’. Nobody expected *kinnar* candidates to win, so no one thought about what would come after the victory, marking a victory as an end in itself. Once each was elected, people turned to the question of what would happen once *kinnars* were in office. All three *kinnars* entered office without party support, political experience, or the educational qualifications that would help them adapt to the job. It is unsurprising that none of these *kinnars* are thought of as having done a particularly ‘successful’ job in office, in comparison to professional politicians.

In the initial ‘experiment’ in Katni, Kamla Jaan was illiterate and reliant upon those who masterminded her election. Although she worked to improve the Corporation office’s efficiency and completed some development works, her tenure was deemed ‘unsuccessful’. Katni-based journalist Arvind Gupta was the first who used the term ‘experiment’, saying that it had failed miserably’ because she was not qualified for the job in terms of education and political experience (Interview, 30/1/11). An assessment of ‘success’ is related to politicians who became before and after Kamla Jaan: although it was a success for voters in choosing their own candidate, her success as a mayor was based on her lack of efficacy compared to previous politicians. Even though Kamla was perceived as more successful than her successor, her tenure was assessed generally as a failure, suggesting that her identity as a *kinnar* and assumptions generated regarding her incompetence in office were the deciding factors in the overall assessment of her tenure as ‘unsuccessful’.

Shabnam Mausi was in a similar position to Kamla Jaan: she had no party backing and no political experience, although she had some basic educational qualifications. There was slow development in the district during her tenure, likely because of a lack of party backing within the Legislative Assembly, which impeded her desire to develop Shahdol district. Her tenure was characterised as unremarkable, despite the quite notable achievement of contesting a general seat and coping with a

campaigns’ costs. During my fieldwork, it was suggested that many candidates did not comply with the budget limit, spending vast sums of money to raise awareness about their campaigns.

move to Bhopal and daily activity within the state Legislative Assembly. Even during the elections, people assumed Shabnam would be unable to do the job, contradictorily positing hope that she would be better than nepotistic and ineffective politicians alongside a more sober appreciation of the limitation of her ability as a politician. Local politician Shankar Prasad Sharma noted that voters wanted change, 'whether she could do the work or not' (Interview, 5/4/11). What was important was voting for a new face in politics, whatever Shabnam could actually achieve in office.

By the time of Kamla Bua's election in 2009, her nomination was seen as less of an experiment. Book merchant Rajesh Keshewani said that given the present political scenario in Sagar (alluding to anger at politicians and stagnation of development), it was not surprising that a *kinnar* was going to contest the election. People expected some sort of controversial reaction like the nomination of a *kinnar*, so her candidacy was no surprise (Interview, 5/3/11). Given positive impressions of other *kinnars*, alongside common rhetoric regarding *kinnars'* incorruptability, the media represented Kamla as a good alternative to the major political parties' candidates (Tiwari, 28/2/11), playing again on the real/fake *kinnar* trope. Since both BJP and Congress had chosen 'bad' candidates who had no popularity or sway with local voters, demonstrating that the state-level parties were unaware of voters' needs (Yadav Interview, 2/3/11). For example, Suman Ahirwar, the losing BJP candidate, was nominated at the state level. Ahirwar was a new face in the party, even though her husband had been a senior member of the BJP for many years (*ibid.*).

People supported Kamla Bua but did not expect much of her as a politician. Interviewees stressed that her election was to punish other candidates, an experiment aimed at teaching them a lesson for past incompetence and failure to keep their promises. In consequence, they did not expect anything from Kamla in the mayoral role and there was an assumption that she might 'fail' once in office. Sudesh Tiwari said that the public knew she was not a good option but had a greater desire to punish the other candidates (Interview, 28/2/11). A lack of belief in her ability was due to her status as an independent candidate, with no prior political experience (Keshewani Interview, 5/3/11).

Arguably, an assessment of each of the three tenures as 'unsuccessful' could be unfair. Each victory could be interpreted as a 'success', as a collective message to professional politicians. Moreover, an assessment of each tenure as a failure does not acknowledge the scale of these victories: each *kinnar* received little political support as an independent candidate and none had prior political experience, nor the educational qualifications to cope once in office. It was unrealistic to expect that the *kinnars* would achieve 'more' than their predecessors, thereby problematising the reason for which they had been elected: to do 'better' than other local politicians. In fact, such an argument is contradictory and reflects both the hope and hopelessness that surrounded

each campaign: *kinnars* were expected to do better than previous politicians by virtue of being (according to campaign rhetoric) more honest and more self-sacrificing, despite a more realistic expectation that they could not achieve anything while in office. Each *kinnar* was thus positioned in an impossible situation, expected to be both capable and incapable. In both regards, their tenures were conceptualised as unsuccessful since they could not achieve what was expected: they could not perform better than previous politicians nor could they overcome stereotypes of *kinnars* as incapable, both based on the reality of their situations (lack of education, experience, support).

The notion of failure may be problematised further by taking into account Judith Halberstam's work in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). For Halberstam, 'failure', 'unbecoming', and 'not knowing' may offer 'more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (2), critiquing heteronormativity and heteronormative conceptions of space and time. She writes that 'failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development' (3), providing an opportunity to challenge multiple facets of contemporary life in which the subject is constrained and made predictable. Using James C. Scott's work on the demand by the state for legibility through standardisation and uniformity (1999), alongside Michel Foucault's theorisations of 'subjugated knowledges', as forms of knowledge that have been buried or masked through formal systematisations of knowledge, Halberstam writes that 'investing in counterintuitive modes of knowing such as failure or stupidity' can provide a form of resistance (11), both to narratives of success and in proposing different relations to knowledge (23). In this vein, reading *kinnars'* 'failure' in electoral politics might produce new interpretations, in which their failure might reveal the heteronormative dynamics of political participation and the assumed standards of success in public life. Halberstam locates her project within queer studies, as a mode for imagining an existing alternative to hegemonic systems (89) and her work has the potential for reimagining conceptions of both failure and success. At the same time, despite a potential reinterpretation of hegemonic systems of dominance and knowledge production on a theoretical level, the common assessment of 'failure' was posited in this case to discredit *kinnars'* participation in political spheres. 'Failure' was used simply to explain away each of the *kinnars'* tenures, despite particular examples that indicate the significance of their victories or their ability to function as politicians.

Even if each case was deemed a failed experiment, constituents still acted within the democratic system to register their 'protest'. Banerjee writes that democracy is 'really an untrue but vitally important myth of social cohesion', where elections are a ritual enactment that maintains equilibrium (2007: 1556). Voting as a regular ritual enactment, a 'necessary safety valve', allows people to air grievances and opinions. As Yogendra Yadav notes, elections 'often appear as the only bridge between the people

and power, as the only reality check in the political system' (2010: 352). However, the process maintains the status quo. Banerjee argues that 'elections require the complicity of all participants in a deliberate mis-recognition of the emptiness of its procedures and the lack of any significant changes which this ritual brings about, but are yet a necessary charade to mollify a restless electorate' (2007: 1556). As one interviewee put it (once a new mayor was elected after Kamla Bua was unseated), 'things are back to where they were before', intimating that while *kinnars* were elected to show voters' disillusion, no systematic change came about as a result: it was only a mockery of the process.

III. When Representation Does Not Translate into Gains

Representation might have a further function: the ability to bring about tangible, beneficial change. Change comes in a variety of forms: economic change, change in social status, educational opportunities, or favourable policy. Preferential policies seek to provide both symbolic and material benefits, as the symbolic representation of minority identities should not be promoted at the expense of redressing social and economic disadvantages. McMillan writes that 'the purpose of policy is to change, rather than reflect, the social structure' (2005: 100). In 1949, B. R. Ambedkar pointed out that the definition of democracy was not purely political, addressing the gap between constitutional or political equality and material equality, noting that political equality recognised the principle of one vote, one value, while the basic economic and social structure in India denied that value (Jaffrelot 2003: 2). Ambedkar recognised that policies that do not also amend material discrepancies would remain paradoxical to the ideas behind the equality described in the Constitution of India. McMillan writes that 'issues of group representation, therefore, should be approached in terms of their political consequences, rather than abstract, and essentially contested, conceptions of group identity and development' (2005: 312). Writing on the impact of electoral reservation policies for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, McMillan concludes that his broad socio-economic analysis implies that there has been 'no relative improvement' of the position of these two groups, in regards to both class status or educational attainment, and that the various implemented strategies, despite intentions that they would lead to improvements, have had limited impact (2005: 315). Similarly, I argue that the symbolic value of representation should not be emphasised over actual changes in the status of minority groups, whether educational, economic, material, or status based. I want to address the question of whether the *kinnars* of MP have benefited from political representation through an examination of changes in their socio-economic status after their political participation. Initial excitement regarding the representative potential of *kinnars'* elections was surpassed by lasting impressions of

their inefficiency, reinforcing stereotypes about *kinnar* identity. Moreover the way that *kinnars* are treated today suggest little or no improvement in comparison to their status before they were in office. I will focus on a change in social-economic status in regards to the three *kinnars*, alongside wider conclusions about the *kinnar* community in MP when necessary. Evidently educational opportunities or favourable policy are not immediately relevant as proof of the benefits of *kinnars'* representation in MP, although I address these concerns in the following chapter when analysing the impact of representation as part of LGBT activism on *kinnar* and *hijra* identity. In the discussion that follows, I turn to focus on social status as indicative of material gains, asking whether each of the three *kinnars'* social status was able to benefit as a result of participation and representation in local politics.

i. Reinforcing Stereotypes

The election of *kinnars* has had an impact on the way people in Katni, Shahdol and Anuppur, and Sagar view *kinnars*, and particularly the ones who contested the elections, specifically in terms of reinforcing negative stereotypes. In my interviews, I made a point of asking almost all of the non-*kinnar* interviewees what people thought about *kinnars* at that time, after the election of particular *kinnars* in their localities. As a result of campaign rhetoric, people explained that initially they were more open to *kinnars* and accepting of their differences and different abilities. Interviewees said they thought *kinnars* might be able do something for them, or act in a different manner than previous politicians, so that their difference (as *kinnars*) seems to have been tolerated initially. However, widely held stereotypes about *kinnars* were eventually confirmed, based on an assessment of their tenures as 'unsuccessful', alluding to the fact that *kinnars* were perceived as inefficient, incompetent, and no better than professional politicians. I discuss some of the negative stereotypes that occurred as a result of *kinnars'* political participation below.

Homi K. Bhabha theorises the stereotype as that which is ambivalent. He writes:

Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved... For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.

(1983: 18)

Bhabha argues that stereotypes must be constantly repeated, like Butler's gender performances, where repetition shores up the norm. Butler also points out that repetition itself creates instability, such that mutations or subversions can enter the system. Thus performance itself contains moments of rupture, which mirrors the anxiety Bhabha is calling attention to in describing any stereotype's instability. For Bhabha, the ambivalence of the stereotype is found in its very instability, as that which is 'always "in place"' and yet must be 'anxiously repeated', and that which 'must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed'. Bhabha's theorisations of the stereotype can inform an understanding of stereotypes associated with *kinnars*, as concepts and narratives that were constantly repeated in order to maintain that *kinnars* embodied such characteristics. Moreover, stereotypes surrounding *kinnars* pointed to 'excessive' constructions of their identity, beyond what could be proved. This might account for constituents' feelings of both hope and hopelessness that I discussed above, where *kinnars* were expected to perform better than previous politicians and simultaneously 'fail', to be both capable and incapable. *Kinnars* could not meet that stereotype surrounding their supposed abilities, as that which was 'in excess' of what could be demonstrated. The ambivalence found in *kinnar* stereotypes produces a reality in which *kinnars* are both 'an other' and simultaneously knowable and visible; as Bhabha writes: '[such discourse] resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognisable totality' (*ibid.*: 23). Stereotypes render *kinnars* recognisable and thus intelligible, despite the fact that any stereotype is 'an impossible object', given that 'the recognition and disavowal of "difference" is always disturbed by the question of its representation or construction' (*ibid.*: 33). Such ambivalence and impossibility should thus be kept in mind in the following discussion in order to complicate the common and inconsistent stereotypes often employed in relation to *kinnars'* political practice.

As discussed in Chapter Three, *kinnars* were represented as self-sacrificing individuals with no normative social ties, who would make more honest politicians. These were idealistic visions of what *kinnars* could offer the general public and were ultimately projections by local voters about the sort of qualities they wanted professional politicians to embody. Thus, *kinnar* identity was manipulated to present the picture of a *kinnar* politician who would better serve the needs of the public. However, once each was in office, support diminished and negative depictions emerged regarding their political inefficacy. Their tenures were characterised as 'failures' and this led to negative stereotypes being generated about *kinnars* in office and the community more generally.

The first stereotype generated was that none of the individuals elected was qualified for the job. It was obvious that none of the *kinnars* had the usual educational qualifications or the social background from which politicians usually come, such as

experience in social or development work, or a political family. Education was seen as an important criterion for entry into the political sphere.⁵ No *kinnar* candidates had experience of local politics and none belonged to a political party at the time of the election, which would have provided party-backing and guidance in office. All of the three *kinnars* had to learn on the job, and served terms that were shorter than the usual tenure of five years.

A further reason that all three candidates were seen as disadvantaged was due to the fact that they were *kinnars*. Each campaign had focused explicitly on this aspect of their identity, portraying them out as ‘real’ *kinnars*. As a result, nobody assumed they would make good politicians by virtue of being bright and adaptable human beings, but instead the *kinnar* aspect of their identity was highlighted and seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage because *kinnar* identity is shrouded by negative and uninformed stereotypes. They were expected to be different from other male and female politicians and people were afraid or hesitant to engage with them (Tiwari Interview, 28/2/11). Avoiding or being unable to work with *kinnars* undermined their position in the political system as elected representatives. Each individual suffered because of this fear. These limitations—lack of education, party backing, political experience, and *kinnar* identity—were crucial in the assessment that they achieved ‘nothing’, proving as impotent as the politicians they replaced. As I argued above, people felt both hope and hopelessness in supporting *kinnar* candidates, knowing they could not achieve more than other politicians and expecting it nonetheless. Ultimately, people explained a lack of achievement was due to their identity as ‘*kinnars*’, assuming that they could excuse a *kinnar* politician for not doing better because they were a *kinnar*.⁶

A second stereotype concerns their perceived impotence in political office. A ‘lack of knowledge about politics’ presumed that *kinnars* did not know what they were doing. For example, Naresh Kosta stated that there was no pressure on Kamla Jaan since she did not know what the functions of being mayor were (Interview, 22/2/11). Similarly, BJP politicians in the Sagar Corporation noted how that the previous mayor of Sagar, Pradeep Lariya, had a background as a politician and a developmental vision of the city. They assessed that Kamla Bua did not have this background or experience of the responsibilities she was undertaking which affected her performance in office, at least at the start of her tenure (Yadav Interview, 2/3/11; Khan Interview, 3/3/11).⁷ A

⁵ It was acknowledged that a lack of education was often not *kinnars*’ fault, but that the education system and society at large had failed them, resulting in a lack of qualifications. Some people took a more sympathetic view, saying that since they had entered politics, it was the job of other politicians to help them (Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11).

⁶ An anonymous interviewee also noted that people did not blame them in the same way they might put blame on another politician, because they were *kinnars* and *kinnars* were already assumed to be useless (Interview, 4/4/11).

⁷ They followed this assessment by saying now that she had joined the BJP, there was a much clearer role and purpose set out for Kamla Bua. This, no doubt, is due to the influence of the

lack of direction and vision for political office was assumed to be a further reason why *kinnars* were unsuccessful. Interviewees often stated that there were no notable changes to their lives or the city or town in which they lived.⁸

While Shabnam and Kamla Bua's tenures were characterised as a time when few changes could be seen, Kamla Jaan's tenure is deemed better in comparison. While Kamla Jaan and her supporters attest to a variety of development works, it is an overall impression of Kamla's tenure that is important. Her tenure was viewed by a variety of interviewees as 'good' because the mayor who followed her was viewed as worse (that is, corrupt and less efficient). Many saw Kamla as running the Corporation more efficiently, even though she did not achieve a great deal, in part because of a lack of funds (Ahmed Interview, 27/2/11). Similarly in Sagar, some positive assessments were circulated about the running of the Municipal Corporation, even if few developments were seen in Sagar more generally. These developments were attributed to Kamla joining the BJP, and were proliferated by BJP supporters or party members, arguing that it was easier to secure funds from the state government with a Mayor and majority from the same party (Yadav Interview, 2/3/11; Bahadur Singh Interview, 3/3/11). Kamla's incorporation into the BJP meant that she received emotional and technical support and could work towards achieving collective aims with government funding. Despite some positive outcomes being evident, people still perceived the tenures overall as not being particularly remarkable and this is what supports the view that *kinnars* achieved nothing in office.

A further stereotype linked to their perceived incompetence was *kinnars'* reliance upon other people. Given their lack of qualifications, each *kinnar* necessarily depended upon other people. Potentially, this opened the door for people to take advantage of them, both Municipal Corporation members and people who had helped the *kinnars* campaign. Whether people took advantage or not, *kinnars* were assumed to be incompetent to the point where people could manipulate them, and this fed negatively into stereotypes about *kinnars'* ability to perform a political role. In the case studies, I discussed significant individuals—almost exclusively men—who 'advised' and instructed all three *kinnars* when they began to campaign, and this role was extended when they were in office. Kamla Jaan was initially persuaded to contest the election by a group of local businessmen, three of whom acted as her advisors. Shabnam Mausi was persuaded to run by local people in Shahdol and was given extensive advice by local politicians in Anuppur before she began to contest the election and when she was the MLA. Certain individuals in Sagar gave Kamla Bua

senior members in the Municipal Corporation. Some of these same members were the ones who provided this assessment of her initial tenure.

⁸ A lack of change led to indifference. For example, people in Sagar seemed indifferent as to whether Kamla Bua was unseated or not as a result of the ongoing petition (Chanchal Interview, 5/3/11; Kesharwani Interview, 5/3/11).

advice and helped to organise her campaign. They also advised her initially in office. BJP Corporators took over once Kamla Bua joined the BJP, especially those in her Mayor-in-Council (MIC). A few interviewees noted that there were tensions that existed between Kamla and the BJP MIC. This reveals that she did not do everything they wanted and they did not take full advantage of her. Some people who advised the *kinnars* had previously been or were involved in politics but many were lay people who became involved in the *kinnars'* campaigns.

A third stereotype generated by *kinnars'* participation in politics was related to behaviour seen as unacceptable from politicians. In certain instances, all three were able to impress people with their behaviour, through acting 'unlike a *kinnar*', but there were also occasions where people disapproved of 'unsuitable' behaviour. When each *kinnar* acted 'unsuitably', they enforced widely held stereotypes about *kinnars'* behaviour. These stereotypes were confirmed by particular stories and rumours that were circulated about their time in office and were reinforced by the media. Kamla Jaan was often represented as 'foul mouthed', shouting and swearing in order to get the job done (Bearak 2001; *Hindustan Times* 2000). The incident of Shabnam Mausi's disagreement with a fellow MLA in the Bhopal Assembly was reported widely in newspapers, possibly due to its sensational value of a *kinnars'* 'bad' behaviour in a political forum (Upadhyaya 2001). Such reporting verified certain types of behaviour associated with *kinnars* and damaged not only each of their reputations but that of the *kinnars* more generally. Moreover, both lay people and Municipal Corporation members alike suggested that their behaviour was at times rude, pushy, and that they treated people in a way that was not suitable for a politician. Often such behaviour was performed in order to get something achieved and was usually effective, since people preferred to avoid confrontation with a *kinnar*.

Despite stories of 'bad' behaviour, many interviewees suggested that the three *kinnars* who were involved in politics were 'unlike' other *kinnars*, or that their behaviour, despite being 'better' than other *kinnars* to begin with, improved while in office. Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua were all described to me as not being like 'other' *kinnars* but were perceived as better, which could suggest that their elections and the visibility of their behaviour had the potential to change stereotypes about *kinnars*. Their behaviour was assessed to have changed through conducting themselves in a professional setting. Kamla Bua's behaviour was described as the 'most improved': people in the Municipal Corporation expected that her tenure would be difficult because she was both a *kinnar* and an independent candidate. Once she joined the BJP, people noted that her behaviour changed, explaining this change as due to her role in representing the party and not only making decisions and acting for herself. Merchant Dilip Chanchal said she used to act in a 'non-traditional' way, doing whatever she pleased, including treating people roughly. He said that once she joined

the BJP, she adopted the style of behaviour as 'other party men do', as if she were 'like any other public representative' (Interview, 5/3/11). Naresh Yadav, a Mayor-in-Council member, said her way of talking changed, making her behaviour fall more in line with other politicians (Interview, 2/3/11). Naeem Khan added that she changed her habits, including her way of walking, dressing, and general behaviour, becoming a more professional politician (Interview, 3/3/11). *Kinnars'* behaviour in office had the potential to change the way in which people saw these individuals and the MP community, but people often emphasised that these *kinnars* were 'different'. I want to discuss, therefore, how each was regarded as 'different' from other *kinnars* in order to assess whether these positive representations could change negative stereotypes about *kinnars* more generally.

Generally speaking, Kamla Jaan was held in highest regard of all the *kinnars* who were elected. Generally, interviewees held a favourable impression of her behaviour. Kamla Jaan was one of the more demure *kinnars*, and the least forceful in her behaviour or opinions, with the result that people held her in relatively high esteem. MIC member Firoz Ahmed noted she 'behaved well' in the Corporation and worked 'as a Mayor' should (Interview, 27/2/11). He said that she did not conduct 'her *kinnar* behaviour', a statement that reveals that most people assume there is a particular form of '*kinnar* behaviour', dictating how they act. Kamla was viewed as different for not complying with '*kinnar*' behaviour and performing it once in office; therefore, people judged that she conducted herself well..

Kamla Bua was the Mayor in Sagar at the time of my fieldwork, and she was regarded well by many individuals in the Corporation. People commented on her behaviour, because she did not act like a 'usual *kinnar*'. Naeem Khan was a staunch supporter of and loyal to Kamla Bua,⁹ explaining that the BJP state level committee did not know what to expect when she requested to join but were impressed with her and welcomed her into the party. He assessed that this was due to her behaviour; she cannot be compared to other *kinnars* as her behaviour was so 'saintly' and she did not have 'other habits' that *kinnars* have (Interview, 3/3/11). Mr Khan said that Kamla did not wear make-up, or bright clothes like other *kinnars*, but is demure in her appearance and behaviour. He assessed that this impression of Kamla Bua has changed the way the public see *kinnars* generally, since they are like other people in Sagar. However he maintained that Kamla is 'better' than other *kinnars*. It should be noted that at the time of this interview, Kamla Bua was still Mayor and this may have affected the way in which interviewees chose to speak about her. In contrast, one anonymous interviewee said that Kamla Bua's behaviour was no different from other mayors. He said that he

⁹ Naeem Khan was a member of the Congress party when he won his ward seat in the 2009 Corporation. He then became an Independent when Kamla Bua asked him to join the Mayor-in-Council, but was removed when she joined the BJP and the Council was reformed. He then applied to join the BJP party when she did.

wanted to be anonymous because he was saying something negative about the current mayor, but did not have a problem being named in relation to other things which could be construed as negative. He went on to say that her behaviour was not unlike other mayors and elected officials in relation to the question of improper financial behaviour, interestingly assessing her not as a *kinnar* but as a mayor.¹⁰ Like other mayors in the past, informal complaints had been brought against her and many suspected that corruption was being practiced in the Municipal Corporation.¹¹ These were only rumours and could not be verified. However, suspicion is common in local political bodies, given that political office is seen as linked to access to goods and benefits (Chandra 2004).

Although rumours of corruption against elected officials are not uncommon, people might be more likely to believe them in relation to certain social groups. Contrary to election rhetoric that portrayed *kinnars* as less likely to steal, a common stereotype presented *kinnars* as greedy and selfish. This could be based on *badhāi* work that, in contemporary society, has become less gift-giving on the part of the family visited and more of an economic transaction that involves bargaining and compromise. This behaviour, alongside the common practice of *kinnars* 'extorting' money from businesses in their territories, informed the stereotype that *kinnars* were greedy and materialistic. Interviewees held this view about Shabnam Mausī and Kamla Bua in particular, although both have notable wealth.¹² An anonymous interviewee complained that Shabnam did whatever she could to get what she wanted, including changing her identity from Brahmin to Muslim to Scheduled Tribe. While I could not test the veracity of this statement, it reveals an assumption that *kinnars* get what they want, and therefore the practices of individuals in political office—whether true or not—fed into stereotypes that circulated about *kinnars*' greed. I heard other stories in which Shabnam was said to have taken objects or money from people or their homes, but these are hearsay and there were no instances where I spoke to the person from whom the object was apparently taken. In Kamla Bua's case, the size and nature of her *sammelan* raised suggestions that the money had been obtained from the Municipal Corporation, extorted as a 'donation'. People were surprised by the gathering's magnificence, but no proof was provided as to the veracity of these suggestions.

¹⁰ He gave the example of construction works, which are notorious for providing opportunities for 'corruption'. Since there is no general public works department, it is necessary to hire private companies. The contractor is granted on the basis of 'who they know' in the Corporation, and as a result of giving the contract, the person granting it takes a cut. This is fairly widespread practice, known as a 'commission'.

¹¹ For example, one interviewee said: 'there were some instances when the commissioner stopped her from taking particular actions on paper, and we know those actions were meant to do some corruption, which is why commissioner stopped them' (Anonymous Interview, 7/3/11).

¹² Such wealth in turn may reinforce the stereotype of *kinnars* as greedy and materialistic.

While certain rumours are explainable as a result of the position that each *kinnar* held, important opinions were generated about Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua's behaviour and ability to 'transcend' their *kinnar* identity. Accounts testifying to their behaviour as 'different' from other *kinnars* had the potential to create a positive stereotype, not just about these individuals but *kinnars* in general. If people could explain a change in behaviour—to that which was seen as more acceptable to the mainstream public—as a result of *kinnars* entering mainstream spaces, then there might be an incentive for them to be more tolerant and welcoming of *kinnars* into other spaces in which they were previously marginalised. However, this does not seem to have worked. This was mainly due to the fact that people argued that these three *kinnars* are different to other *kinnars*, viewing Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua as more like 'normal' people. As a result, other *kinnars* remained stigmatised according to public opinion, despite an assessment that these *kinnars* behaved favourably, in some regards, once elected. On the whole, people did not view *kinnars* any more sympathetically because they focused on the negative aspects that they heard regarding Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, including stereotypes about their lack of qualifications for the job, their impotence and reliance on other people, and their bad behaviour. A focus on negative stereotypes that confirmed widely held assumptions about *kinnars* served to damage the reputation of the three individuals and the community more generally.

The negative stereotypes generated, despite clear examples that demonstrate they do not represent all of *kinnars'* behaviour, all of the time (thus, maintaining a form of ambivalence), equated *kinnar* identity with incompetence and bad behaviour, albeit in the political arena. Journalist Shankar Prasad Sharma suggested that for each *kinnar*, identity as a *kinnar* precluded them from contesting and winning future elections (Interview, 5/4/11). The 'experiments' in Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar were possible because of a specific context in which *kinnar* individuals could be elected, but these were unique conditions. Support faded away as quickly as it was generated, and alongside an assessment of each tenure as a failed experiment, the lasting impression was that of failure which will not quickly be repeated. The stereotypes that were generated continue to have a lasting impact on how each of the three *kinnars* are viewed, and people's impressions of the wider *kinnar* community. The production of negative stereotypes from the political sphere served to reinforce widely held negative stereotypes, with the result that the way the community is viewed has not changed.

ii. *The Inconvertibility of Capital*

To conclude this chapter, I turn to theorise why the representation of *kinnars* in local politics in MP has not resulted in actual change for their communities or the individuals involved. I have argued that there were no substantial benefits for the *kinnar* individuals who were involved in politics, considering the symbolic, expressive, and educative functions of representation, and focusing on the social status of the group through which to assess some form of material gain for the community. Participation in politics did not serve to raise the social or material status of any of the three *kinnars*, nor the community, but in fact reified negative stereotypes regarding *kinnars*. On an individual level, none of the three *kinnars* was able to raise their social status as a result of political participation, nor have they translated their political success into greater social acceptance, economic benefit, or a more tolerant view of the community at large. Adapting Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations on capital and the possibility for conversion of capital in various fields, I argue that *kinnars* entered the political sphere with less 'capital' than a fellow politician—or even a lay person—might have done, and this disabled them from being recognised as a true politician during their time in office which would have allowed them to benefit, in regards to their social status, from political participation. The issue I want to address, therefore, is why the limited capital that *kinnars* entered the political field with, particularly 'social' capital, was unable to be translated into symbolic capital for the *kinnars* during their time in office.

Bourdieu's model of social capital posits that capital may present itself as economic, cultural, or social, which acts as a social relation 'within a system of exchange' (Harker *et al.* 1990: 13). Actors strive for the accumulation of capital, particularly symbolic capital, as the form in which different forms of capital 'are perceived and recognized as legitimate' (*ibid.*). Individuals generate symbolic power through the accumulation of symbolic capital, which functions as a power and a credit (Bourdieu 1989: 23), in order to gain a legitimate position in a variety of fields, within which the struggles for different forms of resources are played out (Jeffrey 2001: 220).

Bourdieu's theorisations of social capital are effective in explaining how actors move within and between fields through the accumulation of capital. Significantly, Bourdieu theorises that it is not possible that 'at each moment anyone can become anything' (1986). Rather, capital, in objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate (*ibid.*). However, in the case of the *kinnars* who contested elections, I argue that the capital that they already possessed, accumulated as a result of their position within *kinnar* society, was unintelligible to normative modes of interpretation, with the result that capital conversion was not possible, despite entry into the mainstream sphere of politics. Considering the forms of economic, cultural, and social capital

available to Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, allows for an assessment of the extent to which such capital was convertible within the political sphere and beyond.

One anonymous interviewee noted that politics in India was not ‘for the common man’, but for those ‘already in power’, who have the means to generate huge support and have the economic means to campaign (Anonymous Interview, 4/4/11). He stated that politicians ‘use politics to run their business and [run] businesses in order to run their politics’ (*ibid.*), demonstrating the need for capital which is convertible—and intelligible, as I discuss below—between, for example, the different spheres of business and politics. *Kinnars* were disadvantaged in relation for their capital to convert, particularly their social capital.

Economic capital is directly convertible into money. I have discussed how Kamla Bua was rumoured to be wealthy, and how Shabnam was said to have accumulated some wealth during her tenure. However, all three had homes and lived in poorer areas of their localities and were certainly not considered wealthy in the way that other politicians were. While economic capital is important for entry to politics, all three were given donations by their campaigners, so that none had to spend much money on their campaigns. Each *kinnars*’ economic capital was thus unimportant to their campaigns, although some accumulation of wealth may have been a motivating factor once in office.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalised state (Bourdieu 1986). The embodied state presupposes embodiment, in which ‘the work of acquisition is work on oneself’ (*ibid.*). It is an integral part of the person and cannot be transmitted instantaneously, unlike money or rights, for example. Bourdieu notes that capital can be acquired depending on the period, the society, and the social class of the individual, and thus quite unconsciously (*ibid.*). Cultural capital can also be accrued in the objectified state, in material and transmissible objects, such as writings, paintings, monuments, and so forth. In the institutionalised state, cultural capital is linked to institutional recognition, such as achieving academic qualifications, which confer cultural competence. In the case of *kinnars* and their ability to generate cultural capital, *kinnars* were seriously limited in their ability to obtain all three forms. *Kinnars*, by virtue of their identity, were unable to generate embodied cultural capital, given the way in which their social class is valued by both the period and society. Moreover, all three of the *kinnars* did not have academic qualifications, which might attest to their competence in a field such as the political one. Although I am not in a position to attest to any objectified cultural capital they might own, such material objects could not be swapped for symbolic capital.

Social capital, Bourdieu writes, is:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—

which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit.

(1986)

The volume of social capital possessed is dependent on the size of the networks of connections that can be mobilised and the volume of the capital that each member of each network has (economic, social, or cultural). Solidarity with a wider network results in more profits and more social capital, and, moreover, any network of connections can be broadened. Bourdieu writes that social capital is the product 'of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites...mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful networks that can secure material or symbolic profits' (1986). Given *kinnars'* social ostracisation, the primary network for *kinnars* is the wider *kinnar* community. There are households and communities all across India, with arguably very powerful and influential members, both within the community, and a few who have wider influence in other fields, such as fields pertaining to LGBT activism, HIV/AIDS prevention, and the realm of celebrity. However, I posit that the social capital available for Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua, as a result of being a member of the *kinnar* community, could not be converted to symbolic capital when entering the political field. The *kinnar* community contains a vast network of households, with many rich and powerful individuals, but such capital is only intelligible within the field of the *kinnar* community itself, where hierarchical status, ritual role, and social power are deemed as symbolic power. It was not that social capital did not exist for the *kinnars* who entered politics, but rather that the capital generated was unintelligible within other fields in mainstream society.

An extension of this argument would be that *kinnars'* habitus and dispositions were also different based on their life experiences and membership of their communities. Since dispositions include one's knowledge of the world (the *kinnar* community, primarily) and drive one's practices and perceptions, they affect the way in which any given field is contested. Moreover, dispositions are constrained by the material conditions of the surrounding world and are influenced by socialising agents. It therefore follows that a *kinnars'* habitus might be different to that of a person in mainstream society. One interviewee said that Kamla Bua faced difficulties because she belonged to a community that was not within mainstream society. He said that they 'have their own way of thinking and way of life, which is very different to that of a common man or woman'. By suggesting that they think and do things 'in their own style', he alluded to what might be seen as a '*kinnar* habitus' (although there would not be a single habitus for all *kinnars*).

Kinnars were therefore unable to enter the field of politics with a significant amount of capital, and this meant that they could not be recognised as a 'true'

politician or were not given a real chance to prove themselves. *Kinnars* did not have economic or cultural capital on which to rely, and their social capital was not recognised through normative modes of interpretation in a way that benefited their status. In entering the field of politics with little capital they were unable to generate symbolic capital in office such that it could be translated back into social or cultural capital that would raise their social status once they finished their tenures. Accruing capital in office was almost impossible, based on their inability to perform due to a lack of qualifications, party support, and experience, and given the negative stereotypes that were generated about the community, reinforcing commonly held views about *kinnars*. *Kinnars* were therefore further unable to convert any capital they had or could gain into symbolic capital, which had the potential to translate into real gains, including economic, cultural, and social capital.

I have argued that representation in local political bodies was unable to raise *kinnars'* social status and provide material gains, alongside a lack of symbolic, expressive, and educative functions. While the representation of marginalised groups has the potential to allow previously marginalised voices to speak and to recognise subordinate and minority interests, in the case of the three *kinnars* discussed, I have argued that representation has also had the converse effect of reifying the marginality of *kinnars'* identity (Chapter Three) and of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the community (Chapter Four). Representation, therefore, might have unintended effects, alongside promoting group visibility and recognition. Moreover, an exploration of how a specific group is rendered visible might reveal certain contradictions and problems inherent in the act of representation itself. In the final chapter, I will turn to consider how *kinnar* and *hijra* identity has come, in contemporary India, to be represented within a different field, that of LGBT activism. In recent years, there has been growing interest by the Indian State in expanding the rights of the 'transgender community', a category in which *hijras* and *kinnars* are included. This is a significant arena in which *hijra* identity is being constructed in contemporary India, driven, in part, by national and international LGBT activism. It is therefore important to consider the effects of such representation as part of a study into the construction of the *hijra* subject in modern India. Moreover, considering representation within a different field extends this study to consider further contradictions inherent in the act of representation itself, particularly focusing on problems that have arisen as a result of shoe-horning the figure of the *hijra* to fit within the 'transgender' category and in rendering the *hijra* intelligible to the Indian State and LGBT discourse.

Chapter Five

LGBT Activism and 'Transgender' Identity

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that the participation of *kinnars* in local politics in Madhya Pradesh resulted in a re-presentation of stereotypical traits of *kinnars'* identity that in turn established *kinnars* as suitable political candidates (Chapter Three) and that this representation did not benefit the community in terms of raising their social status in mainstream society or providing ostensible material and social gains (Chapter Four). The representation of marginal groups in political bodies has the potential to give previously subordinate communities a space in which to defend group interests. However, representation in local political bodies in MP, on the contrary, served to reify *kinnars'* marginality at the same moment that *kinnars* attempted to enter mainstream spaces as equal citizens. I want to turn in this chapter to address the representation of *hijras* in LGBT and queer activism, to question further the problematic nature of the practice of representation. In recent years, Indian LGBT activism has played a significant role in rendering the *hijra* subject visible to the Indian State in order to gain previously inaccessible rights and social benefits for a severely marginalised group. I will explore key issues that are raised in relation to the inclusion of *hijras* within the field of LGBT activism, particularly as a form of 'transgender' identity, in order to explore the contradictions inherent in the practice of representation and to ask what impact State recognition of *hijra* identity has had on the construction of *hijra* and *kinnar* identity in contemporary India.

In recent years in India there have been significant movements to address the marginal status of 'minority sexualities'. Often, *hijra* communities are identified as members of the LGBT collective, identified under the 'T' for transgender. I want to discuss in this chapter, therefore, how *hijras* are represented as part of the wider 'transgender' community and the effect that inclusion in such discourses has had on '*hijra*' identity. Since the historic ruling in 2009 'reading-down' Section 377, a piece of legislation in the Indian Penal Code that criminalised same-sex sexual acts, there has been a general exploration of the rights and the protections needed for minority sexualities in India, both by activist groups and the Indian State. I enquire how *hijras* fit into these debates, particularly those regarding the definition of 'transgender' identity, given current moves seeking to afford rights to transgender individuals. I particularly want to focus on the question of representation as part of the label 'transgender'. There are varying discourses within the wider '*hijra* community' relating to interests and needs and it is pertinent to note that not all of these discourses are recognised, or perhaps visible, at the national level. This is problematic for particular groups whose interests do not seamlessly ally with 'national' interests, with the result that their voices

might remain marginalised within the mainstream discourse. I explore the possibility of heterogeneous and perhaps incompatible interests through a discussion of the differences and divisions between the *kinnars* of MP and the *hijras* of Mumbai, focusing on the figures of Kamla Bua and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. I discussed earlier how my fieldwork highlighted the difference between Laxmi and the *kinnars* of MP, and I chose Kamla Bua for my analysis in this chapter both because she is the *kinnar* who was most clearly invested in advocating representation for the community in MP and due to her senior status in the community. Throughout this chapter, I explore the issues that arise from treating and representing distinct identities within a single categorisation as 'similar' or the 'same'. *Hijra* identity has been negotiated to fit with contemporary discourses on the 'transgender' community in India and with current transnational conceptions of gender and rights. This negotiation has led to a codification of *hijra* identity, in order that the identity can be recognised by the State. I argue that *hijra* identity is being made intelligible in order to secure representation and rights that would alleviate the marginal status of the group members, but, at the same time, that representation within the LGBT sphere might have the potential to shut down heterogeneous voices and interests and codify a particular form of *hijra* identity so that it is intelligible to the State and its mechanisms.

I. Representation and LGBT Activism

In earlier chapters, I employed the theorisations of Spivak and Hall to frame two related but discontinuous forms of representation, as political proxy and as representation. Spivak explores how one speaks both 'for' and 'as' in the self-conscious practices of representation, questioning the inherent contradictions due to the multiplicity of the subject who represents themselves as singular (or at least, homogeneous; 2000: 1432). She points out that representation renders a subject 'narrativisable', framing their acts within modes of interpretation (1990: 144), such that they become intelligible (and no longer remain 'subaltern'). I want to formulate a similar enquiry in this chapter, analysing how the *hijra* subject has been rendered intelligible to the Indian State through LGBT activism, exploring a crucial mode in which *hijras* have been represented in contemporary India. Representation in the debates regarding rights for sexual minorities, I argue, has had a similar effect as that seen in the representation of *kinnar* identity in the political sphere. By being represented as part of the LGBT collective, *hijra* identity is made intelligible to and for mainstream activist (and indeed transnational LGBT) discourse, codifying a particular form of body, behaviour, and interests as normative. I want to highlight certain contradictions that have arisen as a result of being represented within the LGBT collective, particularly the assumption that individuals who can be collated under the

label '*hijra*' might share a common identity and experiences. Aside from the variety of identifications—anatomical, gendered, psychological—that are included under the term '*hijra*', there are important regional, urban or rural, and individual, historical dimensions that affect individual's lives and their agendas and interests. The conceptual possibility of heterogeneous identifications is closed off by determining what *hijra* identity is according to a singular (here, the State's) definition. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, the Indian State is invested in ascertaining 'who' counts as a *hijra* to grant rights and benefits to these subjects. Part of the problem of identifying beneficiaries is relying upon the voices of certain members of the community, not necessarily at the expense of others, but rather by positing those voices as representative of *hijras* in general. The focus for this chapter is therefore the effect that representation has had on the *hijra* community as a result of inclusion within contemporary queer activism and the role and problems of privileging particular voices who speak for and as '*hijras*'. I note that the problem is not the question of which person is doing the representing and why but rather the fact that the practice of representation itself is fraught with difficulties. Spivak articulates that we speak in 'fractured voices' (Ray 2009: 8), revealing that the act of representation itself is problematised through an insistence on the singularity or homogeneity of the voice in question. Similarly, representation of the '*hijra* community' is ultimately impossible, prefaced on an assumption of the singularity or homogeneity of those identified as '*hijra*'.

Earlier in the thesis I noted the regional distinction between the terms '*hijra*' and '*kinnar*' and I have primarily used the latter to refer to individuals and their communities in MP and the former to refer to the 'community' as a whole across India. As highlighted by the discussion of Laxmi and the *kinnars* in MP, in addition to a regional distinction, there are further differences between those who identify as '*hijra*' or '*kinnar*'. Some individuals may identify as both at different times, others, such as the *kinnars* of MP, categorically identify with only one of the terms, citing a difference in outlook, belief, and 'nature' to explain the distinction between identity categories. While there are similarities between those identifying as *hijra* and those identifying as *kinnar*, there are important differences. It is the insistence on similarity through the practice of representation that I want to explore below, asking how certain voices and bodies are posited as particularly representative of the group. The consequence is that individuals who identify in divergent ways may remain unrecognised by the State as beneficiaries, so that representation fails to recognise their interests and needs. In this chapter, I use the term '*hijra*' to refer to the wider community of individuals (as used by the Indian State). However, I use the term '*kinnar*' to highlight that there may also be individuals who could be classified as *hijras*, who refuse such categorisation, and

this refusal is crucial. The implication is that within the identity category 'hijra', there are multiple, distinct, and sometimes opposing voices and interests.

II. Section 377 and Decriminalising Consensual Same-Sex Acts in Private

In 2001, a lawsuit was filed in the Delhi High Court by the Naz Foundation (India) Trust, which sought to repeal Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and to legalise homosexual intercourse between consenting adults. The Naz Foundation is an NGO that focuses on preventing and treating HIV/AIDS and provides education and training regarding issues of sexual health. The criminalisation of same-sex sexual acts was contained in Section 377, which criminalised sexual activity 'against the order of nature'. The Section reads:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation – penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section

(Indian Penal Code, Section 377)¹

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) became an Act of the British Governor-General in Council on October 6, 1860 (Wintemute 2011: 43). In 1837, the all-British 'Indian Law Commission' submitted its draft penal code to Lord Auckland, the British Governor-General of India. The crime of 'buggery' (as per the 1828 Act in England, and for all parts of India in which British criminal courts had jurisdiction), which was punishable by death, was replaced by two broader offences in the 1837 draft, pertaining to the gratification of 'unnatural lust'. The 1860 IPC merged the offences into one offence of 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature', requiring a form of penetration, although it depended on what interpretation the courts would give to the offence. In 1955, the penalty of 'transportation for life' to the Andaman Islands was replaced with imprisonment for life (*ibid.*: 43-44).

Although convictions under Section 377 were rare, with few men booked or prosecuted under the law,² it has been widely acknowledged that the law was used to

¹ Section 377 is contained in Chapter XVI of the Indian Penal Code titled 'Of Offences Affecting the Human Body'. Section 377 is categorised under the sub-chapter titled 'Of Unnatural Offences' (Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi Verdict 2009: 4).

² Govindan (2009b) gives two notable exceptions of Desmond Hope and Miles Patrick. Desmond Hope was detained for a month for allegedly sexually abusing a youth in south Goa (the 'youth' was twenty years old, Gupta 2011: 504; *Times of India* 2007; *Goan Voice* 2007). His unlawful detention was justified under Section 41 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, allowing police to detain anyone suspected of a serious offence, establishing that he was not caught

justify police harassment of NGOs working on sexual health in India, sex workers, and LGBT individuals, including *hijras*, often with a view to gaining monetary or sexual benefits. Many abuses are discussed in a report written for Human Rights Watch in 2002. In a notorious case in 2001 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, four men working on HIV/AIDS prevention among men who have sex with men (hereafter MSM) were arrested. Staff from Naz Foundation International and Bharosa Trust were imprisoned for forty-seven days after the police raided their offices and accused them of running a gay 'sex racket' (Csete 2002: 19). They seized HIV/AIDS-related information materials, denouncing them as 'legally obscene', and charged the men under several sections of the IPC, including Section 377 (conspiring to commit 'unnatural sexual acts'), 120B (criminal conspiracy to commit a serious offence), 107 and 109 (aiding and abetting a crime), 292 (sale of obscene materials), and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (*ibid.*).³ Despite both NGOs being registered and recognised by the Uttar Pradesh state AIDS Control Society for their HIV/AIDS prevention work among MSMs (*ibid.*), the police deliberately targeted these organisations. Other cases of harassment include the arrest of eleven members of Sahayog, an NGO working on sustainable development and human rights issues (including HIV/AIDS education) in Almora, Uttar Pradesh in 2000 (see Csete 2002: 21), harassment of staff working at Naz Foundation (India) Trust and MSMs in Delhi in 2001 and 2002 (*ibid.*: 23-4),⁴ and abuses on staff of Sangama in Bangalore, Karnataka, in March 2002. Sangama works with MSMs in Bangalore, particularly men living in poverty, and their work includes HIV/AIDS information and counselling, but not condom distribution. Despite orders to discontinue harassment of Sangama's staff by both the deputy commissioner of police in Bangalore at the request of Sangama staff and members of the People's Union for Civil Liberties of Karnataka (PUCL-K), police prevented individuals from attending meetings and harassed the organisation by turning up unannounced at their offices. Further harassment has been recorded by outreach workers at Sahodaran in Chennai,

indulging in a sexual act but was arrested on suspicion (Gupta 2011: 505). Miles Patrick, who lived in Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, was given a five-year jail sentence in July 2008 for 'seducing' a local fisherman (Belonsky 2008). In regards to being prosecuted, Csete writes that the Lawyers Collective 'notes that in the case of anal sex, charges under 377 are made against the insertive partner while the passive partner is considered an abettor and may be charged under section 114 of the Penal Code...in recent years formal charges under section 377 have been filed largely in cases involving sexual assaults on minors' (2002: 26, n. 153).

³ This Act of 1986 prohibits indecent or 'derogatory' depictions of women in a variety of media and carries a minimum sentence of two years in prison (Csete 2002: 19, n. 103).

⁴ Naz Foundation outreach workers reported intensified harassment at this time and attributed it to a greater police presence in Delhi after the December 13th, 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament (Csete 2002: 24), the increased visibility of MSMs following the Lucknow Incident, leading to individuals visiting cruising areas in order to 'entrap and blackmail, harass or harm' them (*ibid.*), and confusion between Naz Foundation International in Lucknow and Naz Foundation (India) Trust, which were, as Csete notes, two distinct organisations (*ibid.*). The Delhi-based Naz Foundation (India) Trust was targeted by police and thugs, believing that the organisation had moved to Delhi after Lucknow. Even before the Lucknow Incident, the Naz Foundation was forced to close an MSM drop-in centre, including a sexually transmitted disease clinic, due to violence against men who visited the centre (*ibid.*).

Tamil Nadu. Outreach workers visit 'cruising sites' with condoms and HIV/AIDS information. Csete records that UNAIDS has recognised Sahodaran's work in its 'Best Practice Digest', stating that the organisation has contributed to national advocacy and networking and technical issues related to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, and male-to-male sex (2002: 22). Yet, Sahodaran's workers reported that they and MSMs suffered general harassment. Sahodaran's director Sunil Menon states that it is 'all about money extraction or free blow jobs', explaining that 'if the *kothi* has no money on his person, they [police officers] extract sex' (*ibid.*: 23).⁵

Section 377 played an important role in sanctioning or enabling police harassment of NGOs and their staff who worked on HIV/AIDS issues. In Csete's report, Shaleen Rakesh, coordinator of Naz Foundation (India) Trust's work with MSMs, stated that 'as long as section 377 exists, they will always have it in their power to harass us' (*ibid.*: 24). The existence of Section 377 had serious consequences on the ability of outreach workers to target MSM groups and hindered much-needed HIV/AIDS prevention and education. It also had a devastating individual effect on MSMs and other sexual minorities. Aditya Bondyopadhyay, an attorney in the Lucknow case, gave testimony on abuses against sexual minorities before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in April 2002 (*ibid.*: 25-6). He said that NGO field-staff faced harassment from police 'every day' in public spaces where MSMs socially interact. Moreover, outreach workers were often sexual minorities themselves and were 'regularly beaten, blackmailed, extorted, threatened, and sometimes even sexually assaulted and/or raped by policemen on duty' (Bondyopadhyay 2002). Explicitly linking the existence of 377 and its ability to threaten sexual minorities, Bondyopadhyay argued:

Policemen take advantage of this fear of the judicial process to threaten sexual minorities with Section 377. They employ such threats to blackmail, extort, rape, and physically abuse, their victims. And because obtaining rapid redress is a virtual impossibility, members of sexual minorities usually pay up or accede to the abuse. This also means that the police records never reflect the fact that the threat of 377 was used, for no case is ever registered. This lack of a paper trail—of records of the prosecution of consensual sexual acts between adult males—is in turn used by the police to claim that Section 377 is a benign provision chiefly enforced, as they falsely claim, to deal with cases of male rape.

(2002)

Evidently Section 377 was used both to harass sexual minorities, sex workers, and outreach workers. NGOs and sexual minorities were constantly subject to State surveillance, mirroring the position of the eunuch subject in colonial India. In Chapter One, I noted how 'every aspect of the eunuch's existence was subject to surveillance, premised on the threat of criminal action' (PUCL-K 2003: 45). In a similar fashion, for

⁵ Menon suggests that although senior individuals might be sensitized through the police training offered by Sahodaran on the importance of prevention work regarding HIV/AIDS, harassment comes from grassroots-level cops (Csete 2002: 33).

sexual minorities and those who worked with them, surveillance was an everyday reality, alongside the threat of police harassment and criminal action under Section 377.

Following the arrests in Lucknow, along with harassment of the Delhi-based Naz Foundation (India) Trust, the same NGO filed a petition with the Delhi High Court on December 7th, 2001, challenging the constitutional validity of Section 377. The challenge was founded on the plea that Section 377 infringes the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 (fundamental right to equality), 15 (forbids discrimination based on certain characteristics including religion, caste, sex), 19 (protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech), and 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) of the Constitution of India. The petitioners submitted that Section 377 should only apply to non-consensual penile non-vaginal sex and penile-non-vaginal sex involving minors (Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi 2009: 2). This strategy was necessary to cover lacunae in the law related to child sex abuse and forms of sexual abuse that do not fall under rape law, which was limited by gender and applicable to women only (Narain 2004: 156). Csete writes that the petition argued against Section 377's unconstitutionality on several grounds, including

(1) the prohibition of private, consensual relations violates the right to privacy, which is guaranteed 'within the ambit of the right to liberty' in the Indian constitution; (2) a distinction between procreative and non-procreative sex is unreasonable and arbitrary and undermines the equal protection provision of the Constitution; (3) the punishments prescribed in 377 are grossly disproportionate to the prohibited activity; (4) 377 effectively violates the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex because it criminalizes predominantly homosexual activity; and (5) the right to life guaranteed in the Constitution is violated by 377's jeopardization of HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, by the denial that sexual preferences are an inalienable component of the right to life, and by the social stigma and police abuse that the section perpetuates.

(2002: 26-7)

The writ petition particularly emphasised the HIV/AIDS aspect, stating that 377 'provides a tangible threat to individuals and NGOs who wish to target the MSM or gay community as part of HIV interventions' (*ibid.*: 27).

Chief Justice Ajit Prakash Shah and Justice S. Muralidhar delivered the judgement on July 2nd, 2009. Although they did not strike down the Section as a whole, it was declared constitutionally invalid relating to private⁶ sexual acts between

⁶ Sen argues the 'right to privacy' was necessary to challenge the constitutional validity of Section 377, although it has been problematic to both the queer movement and the legal challenge (2009: 493). In 2004, Arvind Narain noted that asking for the decriminalisation of sex in private would have limited consequences for the wider queer community, including *hijras*, *kothis*, and sex workers, since Section 377 would be operative in regards to the public space (2004: 156). Access to private space is a matter of privilege, Oishik Sarkar argues, which could lead to the creation of normative standards of sex, where 'good' sex is conducted in private and 'bad' sex in public spaces (2008). In an article published online after the judgment, Lawrence Liang and Siddharth Narain argue that 'the court's interpretation of "privacy" to refer to a broad notion of autonomy and personhood has meant that Section 377 cannot be applied in public spaces, where much of same-sex intimacy takes place' (2009). Sen writes that privacy in the judgment has a physical dimension, where privacy refers to an agent's enjoyment of spaces

consenting adults, or, they suggested that Section 377 should be ‘read down’ to exclude consenting same-sex sexual acts between adults (Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi 2009: 23). The Section remained applicable to non-consensual, non-vaginal intercourse and intercourse with minors, since, the court noted that ‘Section 377 IPC is the only law that punishes child sexual abuse and fills a lacuna in rape law’ (*ibid.*). The Court stated that the role of the judiciary is to

protect the fundamental rights. A modern democracy while based on the principle of majority rule implicitly recognizes the need to protect the fundamental right of those who may dissent or deviate from the majoritarian view. It is the job of the judiciary to balance the principles ensuring that the government on the basis of number does not override fundamental rights.

(*ibid.*: 100)

In line with this sentiment, they ruled that Section 377 violated the constitutional guarantee of equality under Article 14 of the Constitution (*ibid.*: 73-79) and because it specifically targeted homosexuals as a class (79)—holding that sexual orientation is a ground analogous to sex—stated that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was not permitted by Article 15 (85). Section 377 was said to impact sexual minorities, particularly men who have sex with men and gay men, solely on the basis of their sexual orientation, a provision which ‘runs counter to the constitutional values and the notion of human dignity which is considered to be at the cornerstone of our Constitution’ (91). The Justices noted that a ‘provision of law branding one section of people as criminal based wholly on the State’s moral disapproval of that class goes counter to the equality guaranteed under Articles 14 and 15’ (92). Since the Section was said to infringe upon Articles 14, 15, and 21 (protection of life and personal liberty), the court left open the issue of violation of Article 19 (protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech) (101).⁷ In their conclusion, the Justices invoked the notion of inclusiveness, which they noted to be an underlying theme of the Indian constitution. They said that the Court believed that the Indian Constitution reflected this value deeply ingrained in Indian society and that this inclusiveness is manifest in ‘recognising a role in society for everyone’ (104). Therefore even those perceived by the majority as ‘deviant’ or ‘different’ cannot be excluded or ostracised, but rather should be assured a life of dignity and non-discrimination (*ibid.*).

It is important to locate the context of this victory for the LGBT community. Backing the petition was ‘Voices Against 377’, a coalition of non-governmental

from which others may be excluded and within which their activities are not monitored without knowledge and consent (2009: 494).

⁷ For excellent analyses of the judgment and unresolved issues, see NUJS Law Review, vol. II (July-September 2009), including Kapur on the regulation of sexual subalterns through ‘tolerance’ (381-396); Basheer, Mukherjee, and Nair on ‘the order of nature’ and indeterminate terms such as ‘unnatural’ and ‘natural’ (433-443); Narrain on the ‘queer’ precedent of the judgment (455-470); Sen on ‘elite’ responses (481-503); and Mandal on ‘the right to privacy’ (525-540).

organisations and activist groups based in Delhi. Its website states that this coalition is a 'point of intersection and dialogue between various social movements...where a united voice is being articulated against Section 377' (<http://www.voicesagainst377.org>). Groups in this coalition include Amnesty International India, Haq: Center for Child Rights, Jagori (a women's training, research, and resource centre), Nigah (a Delhi-based collective working on issues of gender and sexuality), and Prism (a Delhi-based forum which raises awareness about issues affecting minority sexualities).⁸ These voices, alongside the Naz Foundation, were instrumental in bringing the plight of the 'LGBT community' in India to both national and international attention through the petition against Section 377, locating the LGBT movement in India in relation to transnational discourses on rights for minority sexualities.⁹ At the same time, these voices were negotiating what it meant to be 'LGBT' in the context of the fight against 377, and thus were taking part in constructing—even unintentionally—a normative LGBT subject in the Indian context. It is clear that their interests and agendas alone are not representative of the full heterogeneity of subjects who can be located as part of the wider 'LGBT community' in India, reflecting contradictions inherent in the act of representing between the multiplicity of non-narrativisable subjects and the singular or homogenous voice which represents, speaking for and as 'the LGBT community'. I want to turn to examine certain debates within LGBT discourses in India and specifically to question the nature of *hijras*' inclusion within these debates and discourses, highlighting contradictions that arise in the act of representing '*hijras*'.

III. 'LGBT': Whose Fight Is It?

Hakan Seckinelgin writes that global activism constitutes 'particular sexualities that are justified according to a sexual ontology linked with the Western experience' (2009: 104). Yet, identity categories, such as 'gay', are taken up in 'subtle and diffuse ways' by subjects across the globe, appropriating identities in ways that are 'far from uniform, and are infused with locally conceived meanings' (Boyce 2006: 84). As identity categories are assumed and integrated within Indian State discourses on rights for those classified under the 'LGBT' banner, categories that are employed to designate different groups are taken up by individuals and they become identities in the process. The issue, therefore, is what happens to individuals who do not identify with

⁸ See <http://www.voicesagainst377.org/content/view/12/26/>.

⁹ Rahul Rao notes that subaltern movements have 'strong incentives to frame their grievances in global terms and express their political utopias in cosmopolitan vocabularies' (2010: 199). Here, the Indian LGBT movement has contextualised its position in relation to global LGBT movements to gain support on an international level and draw upon transnational rights' discourses.

sanctioned categories, and whether the State can recognise their rights and interests. The LGBT 'community' has clear intentions to include and recognise various identities and preferences demonstrated by individuals with 'minority sexualities', with a focus on gaining rights and the acquisition of citizenship.¹⁰ At the same time, rendering such identities intelligible may have a normalising effect on the multiple, overlapping, and heterogeneous forms that exist as part of the 'LGBT community', so that certain identities must be subsumed within or left outside the definition of the normative LGBT subject. In particular, *hijras* have an uneasy relationship with the 'T' (transgender) in LGBT and I want to explore how identification with the State-used and -approved 'transgender' label may result in problematic negotiations for heterogeneous forms of *hijra* identity. This is not to suggest that no *hijras* are important or present within LGBT discourse, or that none identify as transgender, or that no *hijra* groups participate as part of the wider LGBT community. In fact, my investigation is complicated by the instance of certain *hijras*' strong involvement with LGBT activism, and others' rejection or lack of knowledge about it. I consider it important to attend to how representation functions to include the *hijra* community under the label 'LGBT', as well as how certain *hijras* represent '*hijras*' in general, speaking for and as '*hijras*'. In my discussion, I explore the limitations of the practice of representation in creating a singular and intelligible subject for identification by the State.

In the 1990s, two factors hastened the acceptance of a new sexual paradigm, where a new 'class' of individuals was created for whom 'sexuality seems to have replaced gendered practice as a marker of self-identification' (Reddy 2007: 97). Reddy states that one factor was the establishment of *Bombay Dost*, the first magazine for 'alternative' sexualities in 1990, and the other was the liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, facilitating the emergence of a wealthy upper-middle and middle-class population (98). This emerging population had access to 'out-of-reach' narratives and objects, including an 'evolving gay culture' (*ibid.*). These narratives included global activist discourses on LGBT sexualities. Aniruddha Dutta states that the 1990s was marked by 'visible representations of same-sex desiring and gender variant subjects' in and by the media, even at the same time that dominant discourses on national identity attacked these representations as foreign to Indian culture and perhaps even as dangerous to national security (2012a: 119). LGBT legitimacy was dependent on being able to draw upon global discourses on rights and LGBT sexualities and re-write discourses of cultural nationalism in order to produce

¹⁰ Narrain writes that the 'abstract figure of the citizen has to have a specific character so as to be deserving of rights' (2007: 62), arguing that the queer person is an 'incomplete' citizen, based on the 'primacy of heterosexuality' encoded in societal institutions (he refers to the family and marriage as prime examples; 64). Dominant lesbian and gay organisations tend to fight for assimilation and social acceptability, where access to institutions, such as marriage, signal acceptance for the community (Oswin 2007: 656). However this assimilation, Oswin argues, upholds dominant heteronormative assumptions.

revisionist histories that would justify the (Indian) LGBT community's position within them. Rahul Rao writes that 'queer activism has had to operate within a force field constituted by the teleological pulls of cosmopolitan global activism and the ongoing reality of communitarian homophobia' (2010: 193), negotiating both discourses within the postcolonial Indian context. An instance of this negotiation is the 1998 controversy over *Fire*, a film depicting the same-sex relationship between two married women. At the same time as being praised for its subject matter, the film attracted criticism and sparked mass protests (Jain 1998), especially by the Hindu right, who declared that lesbianism was a western import which would corrupt Indian womanhood and family values.¹¹ Dutta argues that dominant LGBT activism has managed to perform a double move in seeking equal status, by 'contesting and re-claiming the "intimate core" of national culture and identity on the one hand' by portraying non-heteronormative sexual identities as part of Indian culture, and by 'evoking transnationally circulating models of liberal democracy and metropolitan culture on the other' (2012a: 120).¹² In line with this second thread, the LGBT movement in India has demonstrated '[a] desire to keep up with transnational patterns of conspicuous consumption and display that have become a hallmark of metropolitan gay/lesbian culture' (*ibid.*: 123). As an example, Dutta discusses the 'Pink Rupee Party', organised by Delhi-based collective Nigah in the summer of 2009, a fundraising event at the start of a week-long 'QueerFest' in Delhi, which included film screenings, workshops, and performance (*ibid.*). Members of the 'queer' community were invited to a prominent city club for a donation of 400 Rupees, 'to show your support and dance the night away with us'

¹¹ The film's protagonists are Radha and Sita, the names of prominent women in Hindu mythology (Radha was the lover of Kṛṣṇa and Sita was the wife of Rāma, often considered the epitome of womanhood). *Fire* was released by the Indian Central Board of Film Certification without cuts, but they suggested that 'Sita' should be changed to 'Nita' in the Indian version (Ghosh 2010: xiii). Protests began two weeks after the film was released (see Jain 1998). On 2nd December, a matinee show in Mumbai was interrupted by women from the right-wing Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi, smashing glass panes and burning posters. They called on state Culture Minister, Pramod Navalkar, to protest the depiction of the 'lesbian relationship'. Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Manohar Joshi, supported them: 'I congratulate them for what they have done. The film's theme is alien to our culture' (Jain 1998). He later said he supported protest but not vandalism. Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray stated, 'in the name of art and progressive intellectualism, you can't manipulate [this] public medium and corrupt tender minds. Tomorrow it might start in all ladies hostels. It is a sort of social aids [sic]' (*ibid.*). Two weeks after the Mumbai protest, Thackeray said that his party would stop the attacks if the two women were given Muslim names, since 'lesbianism' did not exist in Hindu families (GMax News 1998).

¹² However Dutta notes that by claiming a national culture and identity, individuals use essentialisms of their own. For example, lesbian activists in response to the *Fire* controversy highlighted the historical tolerance of same-sex desire in Indian culture, though Dutta writes this could be a 'nostalgic idealisation of a libertarian Hindu antiquity or of the purported pre-colonial tolerance of different sexualities' (2012a: 120). Revisionist readings of pre-colonial India are commonly adopted which present homophobia as a Victorian imposition (see Human Rights Watch 2008). Dutta notes that these claims refer to high or classical culture, are Hindu-normative, and might account for homophobic attitudes as a result of Muslim invasions, mirroring themes developed in Hindu right nationalism (2012: 121).

(*ibid.*).¹³ Dutta notes that the use of the term 'queer' immediately indicates the class privilege and discursive access of Nigah and its constituency, but such events also indicate the rising economic presence and visibility of the metropolitan gay or lesbian consumer and their ability to take part in social transformation ('show your support'), without 'necessitating further ethical or political commitment (just "dance the night away with us")' (123-4). Only certain individuals have access to these spaces, either socially or economically, and the 'queer' community, and thus normative 'queer' subjectivity, remains inaccessible to many sexual minorities whose identities also intersect with lower socio-economic status.¹⁴

Economic and social distinctions also intersect with an ability to speak English. Many individuals who live in metropolitan cities, who might 'dub' themselves as 'gay', or 'lesbian', or 'queer'¹⁵ also are likely to have some command over the English language.¹⁶ For example, the invitation to the Pink Rupee Party was only posted on the Nigah website in English. However, posts from 2011 onwards on this website are posted in both English and Hindi, perhaps indicating the changing face and/or nature of the Nigah community in Delhi. Ability to speak English is one way in which to directly tap into Western discourses regarding the agency of the sexual subject. Lawrence Cohen quotes Kira Hall as saying that the upper-middle class gay community embraces English as 'an index of progressive sexuality', in contrast to comparatively lower class *hijra* and *kothi* communities (2005: 277). Shivananda Khan writes that among English speaking middle class groups, Western terms are used almost exclusively and the discourses adopted relate to Western understandings of gay rights, lifestyles, and identities (2001: 102).¹⁷ This effort locates the LGBT movement in India as part of the global movement for sexual minorities, echoing Rao's argument that subaltern movements have incentives to posit their struggles in cosmopolitan terms (2010: 199). For example, the initial writ petition challenging the constitutional

¹³ See http://nigahdelhi.blogspot.co.uk/2009_08_01_archive.html.

¹⁴ For example, Sharma (2010) discusses an incident in Uttar Pradesh (UP) where around twenty men were arrested at what was reported as a 'gay party' by the local Hindi-language newspaper, *Amar Ujala*. Sharma comments on 'irresponsible' reporting of the event in Hindi and English media. He uses the arrests to draw attention to the divide between these 'gay men' (in an 'ultra-conservative' town in UP, who probably 'have nowhere else to meet and many perhaps still live with their families') and the (relative) freedoms enjoyed by the 'gay', 'queer', and 'LGBTQ' men and women at Delhi's gay pride march the month before. He ends by asking, would any of these men have even wanted to attend the Delhi pride march, and 'would they understand what "queer" meant at all?'

¹⁵ Ashley Tellis argues that the 'queer?' movement? has appropriated the term 'queer', revealing the elitist and uncritical stance of the 'movement' (2012: 149).

¹⁶ Tom Boellstorff (2005) uses the concept of 'dubbing' to address complexities behind the use of foreign terms and concepts in local contexts. 'Mimicking' and 'borrowing' suggest an authentic identity behind the 'inauthentic' appropriation of a term. Sinnott eloquently states that in dubbing, 'a fusion is created in which the seams are visible' (2010: 24).

¹⁷ Khan also questions the influence of diasporic lesbian and gay Indians on the development of a 'queer India'. He writes that lesbian and gay diasporic groups carry with them their 'newly wrought identities' and discourses on rights, lifestyles, and identities on trips 'back home'. Discourses are often conducted in English and he suggests that Indians privileged enough to access these discourses might then adopt them (2001: 104).

validity of Section 377 included a variety of transnational discourses on the rights of sexual minorities. One concern was sexual health and the perceived impact that Section 377 had on preventing access to healthcare and education and hindering HIV/AIDS prevention to a particularly vulnerable community. In the verdict, the Delhi High Court noted that

homosexuals, according to the petitioner, represent a population segment that is extremely vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. The petitioner claims to have been impelled to bring this litigation in public interests on the ground that HIV/AIDS prevention efforts were found to be severely impaired by discriminatory attitudes exhibited by state agencies towards gay community, MSM or trans-gendered individuals, under the cover of enforcement of Section 377 IPC, as a result of which basic fundamental human rights of such individuals/groups (in minority) stood denied and they were subjected to abuse, harassment, assault from public and public authorities.

(Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi Verdict 2009:6-7)

A focus on HIV/AIDS prevention is an important aspect of NGO work in India, especially in relation to minority sexualities.¹⁸ Since the 1990s, India has seen a large increase in NGOs working with 'sexual minorities', especially in the sector of HIV/AIDS prevention, often targeting MSMs (Cohen 2005: 291; Dutta 2012b).¹⁹ This in turn, has complexified relations among different groups seen as falling under the label 'MSM'. NGOs are funded by both the Indian State and foreign donors, and has created what Dutta terms a 'normative script for identity' through both implicit and explicit aid conditionalities through which these 'sexual minorities' attain funding (2012b). Dutta explains that in order to be recognised and identified by these donors, community-based organisations (hereafter CBOs) working to gain gender/sexual rights or freedoms increasingly need to identify themselves and those they seek to help through categorisations that donors can recognise. In relation to HIV/AIDS funding, the health ministry and the National AIDS Control Organisation (hereafter NACO) mediate foreign aid,²⁰ thereby influencing and controlling which and how varying

¹⁸ Cindy Patton argues that the quest for sexual liberation is interlinked with the discourse on HIV/AIDS (1984: 4). The spread of HIV/AIDS on a global scale has made necessary the work of LGBT activism, intertwining both forms of activism.

¹⁹ Arvind Narrain argues that *hijras* and *kothis* are the specific targets of a public health intervention against HIV/AIDS, constituted as both the vectors in spreading the HIV/AIDS and as 'frontline participants' in the war against it (2007: 68). An example of a primary focus on HIV/AIDS prevention in relation to transgender/*hijra* identity is the SAATHII Report (2009). The primary focus of the report is on HIV/AIDS (2009: 5), despite recognition of other social issues *hijras* face. One participant asked whether the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) was interested in other issues aside from HIV. One speaker replied that 'NACO was focused on HIV' and that the 'prioritized issues of a particular set of people might not be their priority' unless it related to HIV prevention, such as reducing sexual violence (*ibid.*). The report suggests that NACO is focused on HIV prevention over other issues that beneficiaries, the subjects of such intervention, might find equally or more important.

²⁰ India receives 'technical assistance and funding' from a variety of United Nations (hereafter UN) partners and bilateral donors. The DFID (UK Aid from the Department for International Development) and the World Bank are pooling partners with India's NACO in financing the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) III (2007-12), in which the programme 'dramatically scaled up targeted interventions in order to achieve a very high coverage of the

identities are recognised. This creates divisions among these organisations and identities, as well as presenting challenges to communities who fail to fit neatly into these aid categories (*ibid.*).

Dutta highlights the main issue with these efforts as the separation between MSM and transgender ('TG') identities, conceptualised as if based on a man-woman divide, where TG is used for men identifying as or desiring to be women, based on some normative idea of womanhood (2012b). The distinction is problematic in numerous ways. (1) It fails to identify the variety inherent in both MSM and TG communities, creating a consistent identity with which individuals must identify. TG presumes gender variance, whereas MSM is seen as a sexual identity, and ultimately ignores the lived reality of networks and communities where gender identity and sexual orientations overlap in divergent ways. (2) MSM and TG are perceived as separate and mutually exclusive identities and communities, prohibiting flexible identification in different situations and at different points in an individual's life. A system of binary categorisation is problematic in cases where individuals do not acknowledge a clear split between 'gay' and 'transgender' identity: the need for flexible identification is evident in the variety of both English and regionally specific terms used by individuals to identify in different contexts and at different times. (3) In an increasingly standardised funding application process, CBOs must identify whether they work with either MSM or TG communities, or sub-divide their population into enumerated groups. To do so causes confusion and stress for organisations, delays in funding, and problems working among lower socio-economic and rural communities who might not identify according to these strict categorisations (but who ultimately depend upon such funding). Once funded, that organisation must appear to focus on the group they have identified, for example, Dutta recalls that at a new TG intervention near Kolkata, 'too MSM' behaviour was discouraged, since the CBO had to appear as a 'TG' organisation. This normativises TG identity and organisations may only feel accountable to a particular identity, rather than complex communities of individuals. (4) Lastly, a separation between MSM and TG identities divides communities through competition for funds. It breaks down potential solidarities and destroys the notion that MSM and TG identities are groups that can function in dialogue, rather than as separate entities.

Grants for HIV/AIDS prevention, from both the Indian State and foreign donors, are a major source of funding for both larger and smaller organisations working with 'sexual minorities' (Dutta 2012a: 115, n. 20).²¹ Thus, outreach work

most at risk groups'. Donors include primarily US-based initiatives targeting AIDS (Global Fund, USAID, CDC, PEPFAR), various UN bodies (UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP) and the World Health Organisation (World Bank 2012).

²¹ Organisations, especially smaller CBOs, working in rural and lower socio-economic areas, are more dependent on funding than LGBT groups in metropolitan cities may be. These latter

undertaken in the Indian context concerning MSM or TG communities is linked to HIV/AIDS prevention strategies and discourses, which themselves feed into transnational concerns and agendas. The insistence placed on HIV/AIDS prevention, through funding opportunities, might place undue emphasis on the relation between HIV/AIDS and the MSM/TG community. This is not to say that HIV/AIDS intervention and prevention among these communities is not important, especially since they have been made vulnerable through social factors (such as a lack of access to medical facilities, resources, and education, and at high risk of social violence, including rape), but this approach conceives of MSM/TG as primarily a sexual identity that is high risk in its behaviour.²² Dutta notes that this sort of funding economically facilitates institutional queer and LGBT activism (2012a: 114, n. 17). It drives intentions and expectations of HIV/AIDS policies and outreach work itself.²³ Given the divides between 'TG' and 'MSM' identity, I want to investigate how *hijras* are conceptualised as part of the 'transgender' category. Moreover, the way in which the term 'transgender' has been institutionalised is a good example of how the intentions and expectations of funders and activists are introduced and entrenched in the Indian context.

IV. 'TG' for Transgender

i. Who Counts as Transgender?

'Transgender' in the Indian context is often referred to as 'TG' and usually assumes a transition from male to female or is a term relevant to men who identify as or desire to

groups may therefore carry out work that is not tied to the agenda of the Indian state or foreign aid organisations. For a critique of the 'politics of funding', see Tellis 2012: 146ff.

²² Sexually variant individuals, especially those born male, are perceived as a particularly high-risk group for HIV/AIDS (see World Bank 2012). An International Labour Organisation Operational Guideline entitled *Targeted Interventions for High Risk Groups* (n.d.) notes that only some MSM groups are most at risk. In this document (dating from between 2007 to 2012 given its focus on NACP III), 'high-risk MSM' groups are identified as '*hijras*, *kothis*, and double deckers (*not panthis*) (12)'. 'Double deckers' are males who 'both insert and receive during penetrative sexual encounters' (10); *panthi* refers to a 'masculine' insertive male partner (11). However, in regards to 'high risk behaviour', queer women and FTM (female to male) transpersons are often left out of HIV/AIDS funding (which usually focuses on female sex workers). They are also less visible in institutional activism (see Dutta 2012a: 114, n. 17). Regarding the institution of the *kothi-panthi* framework within AIDS prevention, see Cohen 2005.

²³ In indirect ways, the intentions and expectations of policies and funding bodies can indirectly harm intended beneficiaries. In a report entitled *Chasing Numbers, Betraying People: Relooking at HIV Related Services in Karnataka* (2011), Chacko notes that there are barriers involved in HIV/AIDS testing and information access, pointing to issues such as meeting unrealistic numerical targets and people being forced into testing, lack of confidentiality, and bad quality of counselling (15). Chacko notes that staff members at the CBO or NGO level felt that they are 'being policed' (19), since they cannot hold accountable staff members belonging to funding or support agencies.

be women. Activists demanded that funding policy be revised in order to better accommodate gender, with the result that 'TG' entered policy discourse. For example, a 2008 United Nations Development Programme (hereafter UNDP) report advocates that support processes are needed in order to implement Targeted Interventions for Sexual Minorities (in line with NACP III's focus on targeted interventions). A summary of the report notes that they need to 'sharpen focus on the needs of the TG (transgender) community' (United Nations Development Programme 2008). The National AIDS Control Programme Phase III had initially designed targeted interventions for MSM, with MSM and TG marked as a single entity. Activists noted that this ignored gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as neglecting the fact that not all male born sexual minorities identified as male (Dutta 2012b). The term 'TG' was thus introduced to cover gender variance but soon became instituted as a separate identity,²⁴ instead of policy makers' initial intention that the term allow for gender variance among existing MSM identities and consider gender discrimination (*ibid.*).²⁵ The institution of 'TG' as a separate identity required that activists and development agencies sufficiently define what 'TG' is.

Given that 'TG' is commonly glossed as referring to those identifying or desiring to be women, individuals among the *hijra* community are often classified as a subsection of TG identity in India, or are perceived as a group that is closely linked to this identity (although some *hijras* identify as men). In the UNDP report (2008) focusing on targeted interventions for sexual minorities, MSM and TG identities are separated, noting that while the State AIDS Control Societies initially combined both populations, it was necessary to separate them (17). Although the issues of MSM and TG populations are similar, they require 'specific attention' (16). *Hijras* are classified with TG populations, for example, '*hijras* and other TG populations' (17) and 'Advocacy for *Hijras* (Eunuchs) and TGs' (24), conflating these identities as similar or at least part of the same group. The classification of TG as distinct from MSM marks a shift in perceptions where homosexuality and gender variance are seen as closely related or the same thing (for example, assuming that all gay men are effeminate)

²⁴ Dutta notes that the institution of the term 'TG' paralleled adding 'other' as a gender 'option' in the census and other government documentation (2012b). However I was told that the identity 'other' was not an 'option' but was allocated by census officials, ignoring *hijras/kinnars*' preferred identification as 'male' or 'female'.

²⁵ The category 'TG' fit in with NACP Phase III intentions, allowing for 'targeted interventions' among 'high-risk' groups. The World Bank report (2012) designates transgender individuals as a high risk group, with HIV prevalence according to HIV Sentinel Surveillance (HSS) 2010 as 18.80%. The actual report, *HIV Sentinel Surveillance 2010-11: A Technical Brief* (2012) reveals that only three sites were surveyed (one in Maharashtra and two in Tamil Nadu). Observed HIV prevalence at TG HSS sites ranged from 0.8 to 18.8% (2012: 32). Confusingly, Annex 6 of the report (2012: 40) includes a data table of 'HIV prevalence among single male migrants, long distance truckers and transgenders, state wise (2005-11)', so it is unclear whether the data is the same for all three groups or all three groups were counted together. In this table, Maharashtra in 2011 has 18.80% HIV prevalence and Tamil Nadu has 3.82%, with an average given for 'India' as 8.82%. This figure is given elsewhere in the report as the prevalence for 'transgenders' (5, 11) and they are called a high-risk group (alongside 'MSM' identity, with 4.43%).

(Dutta 2012b). TG is thus seen as a gender identity, as living 'in the gender role opposite to the one in which they are born' (SAATHII 2009: 16), although the term 'opposite' presumes a binary framework in which the choices must be male or female and the transformation is from one identity to the other. A UNDP Issue Brief on the '*Hijras/Transgender*' (Chakrapani 2010) notes that the term 'transgender people' describes 'those who transgress social gender norms' and defy 'rigid, binary gender constructions', 'express[ing] or present[ing] a breaking and/or blurring of culturally prevalent gender roles', acknowledging that these people may live part or full time in the gender role 'opposite' to their biological sex (*ibid.*: 3). Both the SAATHII Report (2009: 14-17) and UNDP Issue Brief (Chakrapani 2010: 3) give a list of identities included within 'transgender', acknowledged to be an 'umbrella' term. Both reports posit *hijra* identity as included within transgender identity, despite its specificity. The SAATHII report notes that 'a few transgender persons also believe in a traditional culture known as *Hijra*', which it terms a 'historical cult' (2009: 17). Chakrapani goes further and identifies problems with inclusion, arguing that the term 'transgender' may 'hide the complexity and diversity of various subgroups' within the Indian context and may hinder the development of specific HIV prevention, care, and policies. He acknowledges that certain *hijras* may prefer to be called '*hijras*' and not be subsumed under the term 'transgender', although they might use this term in a global platform (2010: 3). He accounts for the preference for a separate '*hijra*' category by explaining that *hijras* have a 'long history, culture, and tradition', which is not made evident when using the (Western) term 'transgender'.

Seeing *hijra* identity as a sub-group of transgender identity more generally allows for *hijra* identity to be 'appropriated' by the mainstream LGBT community, widening the scope of the term 'LGBT' in contemporary India and allowing for a coalition of individuals with variant sexualities. *Hijras* perform a labour of cultural authenticity through their membership of the LGBT collective, as an 'authentic' 'LGBT' identity that has an established history and place in Indian society, in contrast to other 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', or 'transgender' identities, seen as modern identity forms. It is necessary that the LGBT movement include *hijras*, especially given the size and visibility of the group in contemporary India. *Hijras* are one of the most visible identities among 'minority sexualities' in contemporary India, even if their categorisation as 'transgender' is not quite as simple. Significantly, representation within the LGBT movement re-classifies *hijras* as sexed and gendered subjects, against popular representations of the group as asexual subjects, propagated by both *hijras* and society alike (as demonstrated by *hijra* rhetoric on their asexuality and social rhetoric on their lack of family and kinship ties).

Identification of '*hijra*' with the 'T' of 'LGBT' is also important for classification purposes, in order to deal with the problems and discrimination that *hijras* face. The

Indian State's intention to classify is evidenced by the increasing visibility of the term 'TG' and the debates surrounding 'TG rights' by the State in the years following the reading-down of Section 377. Moreover, the process of collating identities under the 'LGBT' category allows opportunities for people to participate in the politics of recognition through which they can articulate a collective identity. The process creates solidarity and is an attempt to claim a common ground for an identity and draw people together from different contexts under that identity (Seckinelgin 2009: 116).

Seckinelgin writes that while the LGBTI category sets out a framework for identification, where people are required to identify with it in order to join the demand for rights, on the other hand, public reaction to categories is 'producing violent responses' towards those identifying with said categories (2009: 108).²⁶ He questions whether people can have sex without being identified with one of the letters in the category, and if they do, he asks, 'what happens to their rights to have a sexuality (and gender) that is not captured by the LGBTI rights?' (*ibid.*). He argues that in order to be a political actor, one needs to be intelligible within a particular political debate, struggle, or activity. 'Thus', he writes, 'the reality of homosexuality as sexual practices in everyday lives needs to be translated into identities that are assumed to be politically intelligible' (109). Seckinelgin argues that two steps are necessary: to construct one's self as a subjectivity that is linked to a particular politics, and in this political participation, to think of one's self 'consciously and elaborately' in relation to the LGBTI category, even if this is not how a person sees themselves in their everyday sexual practices (*ibid.*). Then the subject can be recognised and identified. While Seckinelgin advocates the possibility of alternative categories that might align with the LGBTI category, in order to attain rights, identification with the label 'TG', at least currently, is necessary for *hijras*. Part of the issue is the wide range of terms with which the community currently identify, differing according to the labels used by the Indian State, aid and donor agencies, and among *hijras* themselves, often informed by regional location. The wide range of identity groups can cause confusion for the State and among the mainstream public as to the chosen identities of individuals—which can lead to issues such as harassment in train carriages, inability to receive medical attention, and denial of rights such as voting and standing for election—and anxiety among the *hijra* population.

²⁶ Rao makes an important point about how the increased naming of subjects as 'LGBT' has led to increased visibility and thus policing by state mechanisms, although he is discussing the role of Western activists in naming subjects as LGBT. He argues that such visibility is the result of 'gay rescue narratives', where states that do not respect rights around sexual diversity are characterised as backward and gay subjects of these states are perceived as in need of saving (2011: 43; 2010: 179-189). These rescue narrative signal the 'contemporary eagerness of white gays to save brown gays from brown homophobes', Rao writes, paraphrasing Spivak's own critique of colonial paternalism, and traces the emergence of this discourse through Puar's notion of homo-nationalism (the collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism) (2010: 182).

There are a wide variety of 'identity' options for *hijras*. Although members of the community are commonly referred to as '*hijras*', this term is not always applied in regional contexts. For example, almost all the *hijras* I met in MP and Gujarat identified as '*kinnars*', which was also the term used by the majority of the mainstream population. Individual states can influence how populations are named, for example, in Tamil Nadu, *hijras* are referred to as *ali* or *aravaṇi*, but more recently, under an initiative of the state government, are called '*tirunaṅkai*', meaning 'auspicious woman' (Craddock 2012). Not all *aravaṇi* have adopted this term, but some have, given that it has a positive meaning for the community.

There are alternative 'identities' that *hijras* can adopt. The Indian State allows *hijras* to identify as 'male' or 'female', such as on the Electoral Roll. On occasion, alternative or 'third' categories are created. In 2005, the Indian State introduced onto the website version of the passport form the choice of 'E' for 'eunuch' in the column for 'sex', meaning that there were three choices: male, female, or 'eunuch' (*Telegraph* 2005). In the most recent census of 2011, *hijras* were counted as 'other' in the column for sex; again, there were three choices: male, female, or other. Although *hijras* could identify as 'eunuchs' for passport applications, they were designated as 'other' in census counting. Many individuals in MP refused to be counted because they did not see themselves as an 'other' gender, but as 'male' or 'female'. Kamla Bua and Heera Bai told me that 200 *kinnars* they knew refused this categorisation; they met with the election commission in Bhopal requesting that they take this matter to the central government. This indicates a tension between State and individual classification, where certain members of the public failed to be recognised by the State. The census in 2011 was the first time that the *hijra* population in India was enumerated, but only according to the designated classification 'other'.²⁷

A wide choice of identification terms is also problematic to the extent that individuals might have different 'identities' on different documents, such as on the electoral roll, their ID card, their passport, or their ration cards. This has led to problems for *hijras*, including being turned away from voting, receiving rations, or healthcare²⁸ because of identity discrepancies. There are further issues that *hijras* face

²⁷ This issue works both ways: some *hijras* want to be identified as 'other' (or some 'other' category, such as 'third' or 'transgender'). In 2009, some 'eunuchs' avoided voting due to a 'third sex dilemma', since they were 'unwilling to identify themselves as male or female on voter registration forms' (Agence France Presse 2009).

²⁸ *Hijras* often cannot access free healthcare facilities or find discrimination so intolerable that they no longer seek help. *Hijras* face discrimination due to their transgender status, presumed or real occupation (sex-work), or presumed or real HIV status (Chakrapani et al. 2004: 12). Forms of discrimination reported include deliberate use of male pronouns; registration as 'males' and admittance in 'male wards'; abusive language and harassment by staff and male patients; lack of knowledge and insensitivity of healthcare providers; and even denial of medical status (Chakrapani 2010: 10). However, there are calls to better understand 'transgender' needs, particularly in relation to sex reassignment surgery or endocrine treatment (India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2013; Kalra 2012) or the role of psychiatry (Chandran 2009; Kalra 2010).

through being conceived of in multiple ways by the State. For people who change their sex or gender identity, gaining legal recognition of their lived identity is difficult, and this impacts other aspects of their lives including their right to marry and adopt, and in relation to inheritance and wills and employment discrimination (see Chakrapani 2010: 10).

In addition to issues relating to identification, the *hijra* community struggle with various aspects of their daily lives. This includes lack of opportunities for education and employment; lack of State provision in regards to healthcare facilities and housing; a lack of protection against social and sexual violence by the law; and a general lack of recognition by the State in regards to their rights as citizens. Although an extension of laws may not be able to make substantial changes to the way *hijras* are perceived by the mainstream public, there have been important developments in attempts to rectify the inequalities experienced by the *hijra* community with regards to education, access to healthcare, social marginalisation, and general human and civil rights.

Responding to demands made by ‘transgender’ individuals and activists, the Indian State has embarked on a series of hearings and public forums to discuss issues of importance to the ‘transgender community’ (see Chowdhury 2011, Ali 2012). Although there have been welfare boards established in individual states, such as the notable case of the Transgender Welfare Board formed in Tamil Nadu in 2008,²⁹ no such board exists to help the transgender community on the national level, even though there have been numerous calls for its inception.³⁰ The first public forum was organised in Mumbai in November 2011 by Article 39, a division of the Center for Legal Aid and Rights, with support from the UNDP (Chowdhury 2011). The intention of these forums was to gather testimonial evidence from various sources, which would suggest the necessary steps that the government should undertake in ensuring greater human and civil rights for *hijras*. Laya Medhini of the Centre for Legal Aid and Rights stated that ‘the public hearings will be held to map needs, to articulate problems, talk about rights denied, violence faced and to find a common thread in the stories of the *hijra* community’ (*ibid.*). Ernest Noronha, the Programme Officer from the UNDP described these hearings are part of a ‘larger sensitisation programme’. Although there is huge variation among the transgender community, Noronha noted that there ‘should be a larger push to establish their legal identity so that they can at least be recognised as citizens of the country’ (*ibid.*). Some of the issues raised by members of the transgender population were sex change surgery, access to education, social

²⁹ For an initiative undertaken in East India by SAATHII, see <http://saathii.org/calcuttapages/undp-tg-hijra-cnsltn-report-final.pdf>.

³⁰ The UNDP Report of 2008 notes that the creation of both a National Task Force and a *Hijra* Welfare Board was highly recommended by participants at the UNDP consultation (24), which included NACO and other AIDS control groups, the Lawyer’s Collective and rights associations, and organisations working on minority sexualities and sexual health (27).

stigmatization, HIV prevalence and health issues, access to basic services, violence against the community, and rights' violations (Ali 2012; Chowdhury 2011).³¹ The project continued throughout 2012, with meetings held in Ahmedabad, Lucknow, and Delhi. It is a nascent project, with initiatives being raised, but thus far none have been implemented.³²

ii. *Who Speaks on Behalf of 'TGs'?*

Given the development of initiatives and consultations into the status of the TG community in India and the impact this is likely to have on individuals, including the *hijra* community, it is pertinent to ask the question, 'who speaks on behalf of TGs'? As Noronha pointed out above, there is significant variation among the transgender community (Chowdhury 2011), so there are competing interests and agendas. Dolly Thakore, a theatre actress and social activist, was a member of the jury that oversaw the first public forum addressing transgender issues in Mumbai in November 2011. She identified that many transgender individuals are uneducated, saying 'hence, they are not aware of their rights. As a result they are exploited by others'. Thakore went on to emphasise that among the community, 'there are members who are educated and doing their bit for the upliftment of the transgender/*hijra* community' (*ibid.*). Certain educated *hijras* or transgender individuals are the ones invited to speak on behalf of the community, such as the *hijras* who were invited to speak at these public forums.

While *hijra* participating in these forums can identify community needs to an extent, they cannot be said to represent all members of the group. It would be ludicrous to suggest that any member of a group can speak for all of its members. The issue of 'who speaks' for TG interests mirrors a concern seen around the prominence of privileged voices in the mainstream LGBT/queer community, who, more often than

³¹ By extension, certain programmes have been implemented to gather in-depth information and put forward proposals for government action, such as 'Pehchan', a programme implemented by the India HIV/AIDS Alliance, focusing on the HIV response for vulnerable sexual minorities (supported by the Global Fund). An example of a response to an issue was a brief released by Pehchan on access to gender transition services, including hormonal treatment, breast augmentation, and sex reassignment surgery. The brief provides recommendations regarding developing policy and clinical guidelines at the national level and provision of services (India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2013).

³² In contrast, there have been significant developments in Tamil Nadu, the most active state in ensuring better treatment for *aravani*s as early as 2003 (when they formed a state subcommittee on transgender welfare): providing ration cards, giving a choice of gender (male or female) on applications for official documents, and offering free and subsidised housing (Govindan 2009a). In December 2006, the state subcommittee issued a government order with recommendations to improve their 'living conditions', including counselling and sensitisation programmes and counselling for MSMs against pursuing sex-reconstruction surgery (SRS) (see Government of Tamil Nadu 2006). This order also provided disciplinary guidelines for schools and colleges who refused to admit *aravani*s and information for medical institutions regarding SRS (*ibid.*). The Aravani Welfare Board was formed in May 2008, who issued another government order guaranteeing reserved seats to transgender individuals in colleges and universities across Tamil Nadu (*ibid.*).

not, tend to be middle-class, metropolitan, English-speaking 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', or 'transgender' identifying individuals. While *hijra* identity has been subsumed within the wider LGBT collective, it is likely that only certain *hijra* or TG voices are heard within LGBT debates.

LGBT activism in India, through identifying a variety of minority sexualities as part of the collective, has the potential—as any movement that distinguishes itself as fighting for rights for a specific group—to speak about, and thus construct, a normative subject. Ratna Kapur points out that through engagement with the law, the 'sexual subaltern' is de-radicalised. This leads to a 'flattening out' of the sexual subject, so that they are produced and regulated through, what Kapur terms, the 'discourse of tolerance' (2009: 384). In this sense, the subject is rendered intelligible through a process of normalisation, and thus becomes visible to and is policed by State mechanisms. Kapur argues that tolerance performs both a space for the proliferation of sexual identities and a regulatory function when it cannot 'totally exclude or efface the sexual "Other" with ease' (*ibid.*: 396). Tolerance addresses 'the excess', that which is left out by 'formal equality', which is limited or shaped according to dominant norms (*ibid.*: 384). Dominant religious norms and normative sexuality proscribe certain norms relating to behaviour, propriety, and sexual conduct. Lisa Duggan's notion of 'homonormativity' is useful here, which refers to a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but instead upholds and sustains them. Claudia Schippert writes that 'homonormativity' dictates the "'normality" of the "good" and responsible gay subject along similar lines to the ones defining the heteronormative subject' (2011: 77). Thus, minority sexualities are tolerated, as long as they confirm to dominant heteronormative patterns relating to identity. Schippert notes that through homonormativity a 'gay moralism' has developed, marked by attacks on promiscuity and other sexual practices viewed as deviant from within the gay community (*ibid.*). A growing literature in the West records how LGBT recognition and visibility tends to include 'elite queers' into discourses of nationality, citizenship, and socio-cultural respectability, Dutta writes, at the cost of the 'continuing or increased marginalisation and deprivation of racial and socio-cultural others' (2012a: 113). In the Indian context, the continuing marginalisation of certain groups is the result of regulative practices and discourses in response to forms of 'gay' identity seen as 'too deviant'. Certain behaviours are viewed as inappropriate or disruptive, especially those of minority LGBT identities such as the *hijras*, which makes evident a tension that has arisen through inclusion of *hijras* among the LGBT collective. As an example, Dutta discusses an article entitled 'Let's Keep the Pride', which marked the first anniversary of the 2009 High Court Judgement (2012a: 110-111). The article supports the political legitimacy of the LGBT community, but focuses on the 'inappropriate behaviour' of a few transgenders, who 'started lifting

their skirts and shouting swear words—enough to embarrass those of their own community who were till now enjoying the party’ (Afaque 2010).³³ Dutta rightly notes that the ‘middle class visibilisation’ of queer identity references metropolitan (and international) LGBT culture and this is seen as ‘provocative’ and ‘in good fun’, borrowing words from the *Hindustan Times* article (2012a: 130). The news article records how ‘men kissed men’ and ‘women hugged women’, wearing t-shirts ‘bearing provocative images (two London bobbies kissing), or words (“Unf**k the world”)’ (2010). Yet certain *hijra* and *kothi* modes of visibility ‘embarrass’ the LGBT community: the *Hindustan Times* article quotes non-*hijra* participants as saying ‘they are spoiling the moment’s sanctity’, ‘this kind of behaviour at a place like Jantar Mantar is so unacceptable’, and ‘the worst part is that we can’t stop anyone from participating’ (Afaque 2010). Ashok Row Kavi, one of India’s most prominent LGBT rights activists, is quoted as saying that the ‘gay’ community has to show whether it can behave responsibly’, and, ‘like all oppressed people, we must learn how to use our rights sensibly’ (*ibid.*).

The imposition of regulative discourses and practices upon behaviour seen as disruptive and deviant is evident, revealing that the inclusion of *hijras* has disrupted ‘middle-class’ modes of sensibility: the LGBT movement need the *hijras* in creating an authentic LGBT identity, despite a rejection of some of their practices. Dutta writes that LGBT behaviours and discourses can be disruptive, but ‘not too much’. She points out the balancing act that LGBT discourse has to manage:

The valorisation of middle class ‘provocation’ speaks to the contradictions of the dominant LGBT evocations of cultural-national and political-civic citizenship, which must disrupt nationality and civility (through ‘provocative images [...] or words’) but *not too much* – establishing a delicate balance between normative culture and LGBT difference by precluding acts too aggressive, excessive or crass for middle class ‘provocation’.

(2012a: 131)

Since the LGBT movement claims a space within civil society, there is an assumption that their social and sexual practices should measure up to heteronormative standards, and this has created a form of homonormativity in India that is policed by both the mainstream ‘gay’ or LGBT community and the State, demonstrated by the tension with *hijra* and *kothi* performances, seen not just in relation to their sexual practices, but also

³³ Mitra argues that mainstream news coverage focuses on the spectacle angle of marches, rather than that protest aspect (2010: 172; however, Mitra is discussing the June 2008 pride marches where one of the protest demands was the amendment of Section 377; p. 174). Following a network of Indian ‘queer bloggers’, Mitra writes that, in their opinion, the media panders to stereotypes of queer, particularly queer as *hijra* (172). He adds that the blogs studied are not representative of all queer Indian blogs, or the only queer Indian bloggers’ community, and are made up of Indian and diasporic bloggers (168). Alongside the media’s focus on the spectacle of *hijra* participants, the Afaque article’s focus on *hijra* and *kothi* behaviour is representative of mainstream LGBT concerns. The ‘queer’ bloggers might be said to belong to a normative LGBT community, at least those located in India, given their access and presence online.

their civic and social ones. Alongside media reports dictating what behaviour is seen as acceptable and what is not (including by members of the LGBT community), reports of the consultations involving *hijras* and other 'minority' sexualities reveal what is expected of these individuals. The *Report of the Regional Transgender / Hijra Consultation in Eastern India* outlines specific 'ground rules' for the meeting, as suggested by a participant who was on the convening committee (SAATHII 2009: 4). The rules included 'to maintain discipline, no clapping and no personal attacks', and also listed 'no threats to anyone', 'asking respectfully for meaning of new terms if needed', 'speaking one at a time', and 'raising one's hand to speak'. It is not uncommon to set ground rules, but these rules allude to behaviours commonly expected of *hijras*: clapping, strong and forceful language, and general disregard for 'common decency'. Specific forms of behaviour are advocated here, as well as an assumption of what practices should be erased. This sentiment may extend to religious practices. Govindan notes that in Tamil Nadu, activists see that the 'rehabilitation' of transgender women by the Tamil Nadu government and activists can lead to an 'erasure of all that is oppositional, subversive, and empowering about the re-authoring of heterosexist Indian traditions' by *aravani* religious practices, particularly the popular *aravani* event at the Koovagam Festival (2009a). Govindan stresses the empowering space that *aravani* performance might open up, through what she terms a 'subaltern re-reading of an episode from the *Mahabharata*'. She notes that the Tamil Nadu state's 'reformist tendencies' are revealed

in the following observation made in The Hindu in a news item on the *aravanis*' response to the constitution of the Aravani Welfare Board: 'KM Ramathal, of the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women, said the transgenders had rights to celebrate, but by taking part in certain rituals like tying the "*thaali*" and removing them" in Koovagam, the transgenders were only lowering themselves'.

(2009a)

By seeing this practice as 'lowering' transgender identity, the state made a judgement about what sort of practices should and should not be acceptable for the *aravani* community, in line with what it saw as respectable practices for the community in relation to mainstream practices.

Regulative practices impact various 'minority' sexualities within the LGBT community through an insistence on modes of practice that align with conservative sensibilities, but I have focused here on *hijra* practices and the way in which *hijra* identity is being constructed in relation to 'transgender' identity. Evidently, certain interests and agendas are set by the mainstream LGBT/queer movement, primarily focused on redressing previously disregarded rights and needs pertaining to minority sexualities. At the same time, there are different demands being made and different actors behind those demands. While *hijras* are included within the LGBT movement, they might be seen as a 'minority' sexuality within a coalition of 'minority sexualities',

loosely identified with the term 'transgender'. Seckinelgin argues that many people on whose behalf rights are claimed are recognised as LGBTI people but are unable to reformulate and rethink their own position within that framework (2009: 113). Similarly, many *hijras* have not reformulated their own position in response to positioning within the LGBT category. It is unsurprising that many of the *hijras* who engage with or are aware of LGBT discourses are confined to metropolitan cities and have access to global discourses. As a result, their interests might conflict with those of *hijras* in other parts of India. Many *hijras* living in rural areas do not identify with the LGBT movement, or may not even be aware of it. Listening to voices that speak as representatives of the *hijra* community without an acknowledgement of the variations between *hijras* has the potential to regulate that heterogeneity and ignore contrasting opinions and interests. I now turn to consider an example of this heterogeneity that became evident during my research.

iii. *Disparate Voices*

An example of variant discourses within the *hijra* community can be demonstrated by comparing different attitudes and interests among the *kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh and the *hijras* in Thane district, Mumbai, although the discussion that follows cannot be generalised to represent all '*kinnars* in Madhya Pradesh' in contrast to '*hijras* in Thane'. Rather, I want in the following discussion to highlight the disparities between two particular voices from two widely diverse backgrounds, with the caveat that they, in turn, are not fully representative of the communities to which they belong but rather exemplify two possible, albeit prominent, perspectives in a spectrum of various positions. This discussion is limited in its scope by focusing on two individuals in order to draw a comparison: Kamla Bua, the most vocal on '*hijra*' issues of the *kinnars* I interviewed, and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a well-known *hijra* activist in Mumbai. I want to highlight differences between what they believe is important for the *hijra* community, informed by their opinions, personal contexts, and experiences. I use this discussion to highlight divergent positions, which are problematised further because both, on different occasions, have been established (particularly by the State and other institutions of governance) as representative of their communities, or the wider community of '*hijras*'. Indeed, their positionality as individuals who could be identified as representative might disqualify them from representing others; it is clear that both are exceptional figures who are limited in their ability to be representative (in a descriptive sense). However, this discussion is intended to draw out two divergent positions, in order to suggest that an awareness of their difference of positionalities and opinions points to a need to consider further the different voices within the *hijra* community, which might, in fact, advocate for different ends.

My initial discussion in Chapter Two revealed that both Kamla and Laxmi have a different understanding of what '*hijra*' identity is, what it means to be a *hijra*, and to belong to the *hijra* community. I want to discuss three subjects in order to demonstrate the difference between their lives and beliefs: gender identification, forms of activism, and opinions on the 'future' of the *hijra* community. By contrasting these individuals, I explore the ways in which they speak for and as *hijras*, how they represent 'their' community, and highlight differences that arise from context and location and proximity to or place within (predominantly English) LGBT discourses. These are just two of the possible discourses within the *hijra* community, demonstrating how the community does not speak with a single voice, and considering how the dominance of one voice—the normative '*hijra*' voice—is problematic in attempting to provide representation for the wider community.

The first time I met Laxmi in Thane, I asked her opinion on the elections of *kinnars* in MP. She said that while their elections were a good thing, they had 'not done enough' for the *hijra* community whilst were in office: they had not fought for *hijra* rights. Laxmi's critique should be framed within the context of her own social work and her self-presentation: as an educated and socially mobile activist, in a metropolitan context, who is engaged with debates the lack of rights afforded trans people and other subordinate communities. In the following discussion, I explore how Laxmi and Kamla Bua may, in fact, be fighting for different ends, and that both may not view each other's agendas as relating to their own.

First, both hold different positions over the theme of gender identification. Laxmi's work raises awareness of what might be termed '*hijra*' and 'transgender' issues,³⁴ often framed by transnational rights' discourses. Her own identity as a *hijra* has been instrumental as a place from which to speak about interests that she sees as pertinent to the transgender community, although her education, experience in the NGO-sector (both in India and internationally), fluent English, and access to western concepts and discourses on sexual health and human rights have played a large part in informing her sense of identity as a *hijra* or transgender person. For example, in 2009 Laxmi is reported to have said that she had never voted and refused to do so until there is a 'transgender option' on identity cards. 'It's the question of the identity of our whole community,' she said, 'in spite of so many years of independence we haven't got our own identity, our own place in the constitution of India' (Agence France-Presse 2009). By focusing on *hijra* identity as separate from and not male or female, Laxmi constructs *hijra* or transgender identity as distinct from male and female. This distinction reflects how she sees her own gender identity. She told me that she 'enjoys' her femininity more than a woman might, but does not identify in the same way a

³⁴ I use both terms when referring to Laxmi as she uses both in her conceptualisation of the community, with nuance used for different forums.

woman might (as a 'woman'). It is hyper-femininity in her case. On the other hand, Kamla Bua clearly establishes her identity within the binary framework of male or female. Kamla identifies as a female *kinnar* and took pains to stress the gendered aspect of her *kinnar* identity. Her refusal to be counted as 'other' during the 2011 Census counting reveals a strong conviction that *kinnars* should not be seen as a separate sex, counted apart from male and female categories.³⁵ I noted in other instances in MP that *kinnars* would identify as either male or female *kinnars*, but not simply 'kinnar' without gender clarification.

Linked to the issue of not wanting to be named as 'other' is a demonstration of Kamla's 'social' activism on behalf of *kinnars* in MP. Both Kamla and Heera Bai, one of Kamla's *celās*, said they refused to be counted by the census officials, along with 'over 200 *kinnars*' who felt the same way. On their behalf, Kamla and Heera visited the state government election commission to submit a petition that refused the imposition of the 'other' gender categorisation, protesting the layout of the form and asking that *kinnars* be allowed to choose their gender as female or male (as possible on other State documentation). It is not clear whether Kamla and Heera encouraged other *kinnars* not to be counted or whether it was individually motivated, but both their past political experience and willingness to engage with the state apparatus on behalf of other members of the community is evident. Kamla showed her willingness to advocate for what she terms 'kinnar rights'—in the sense of equal rights for *kinnars*, not special rights—on previous occasions. She sent a letter to the Supreme Court before her election, advocating that *kinnars* should have equal rights, as men and women did, under the Constitution of India. She proudly showed me a letter she had received back from the Court, acknowledging that 'transgender' people should have equal rights, and Kamla read it as recognition of her hard work. More recently, Kamla was invited to participate in a meeting on the 23 August 2013, held at the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment in Delhi. More than fifty *kinnars* from across India were present, including Shabnam Mausi (Singh 2013). Kamla said that the State was ready to draft a law relating to *kinnars*' right to choose their gender and religion, and that three more meetings were scheduled which she would attend (Interview, 28/8/13).

Such activism is significant for the ostracised community in MP and Kamla Bua might be identified as a 'natural' leader due to her status among *kinnars* in Sagar district and her prior experience of municipal politics. Her invitation as a representative of the MP community to the Delhi meeting may have been due to familiarity with her name as a result of political participation. Kamla is used to speaking for the *kinnar* community and working with press, with government officials,

³⁵ Her emphasis on the female aspect of her *kinnar* identity could have been influenced by the petition in the Sagar District Court, which also challenged her gender status. At the time of Census counting and when I interviewed Kamla, she was answering this petition in the court. It was therefore important that she stress the 'female' aspect of her identity.

and making her opinions known to the wider public. Laxmi also shares the latter experience, with the added benefit of her social status. She is a well-known personality in Mumbai, in social, activist, and celebrity circles, and relating to her work in an international context (for example, on the UN Civil Society Task Force on HIV / AIDS and as part of the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, part of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission). Laxmi therefore speaks from a powerful and respected position on *hijra* and transgender issues, uniquely qualified as a person from within the *hijra* community itself. She is perceived widely as a representative of the community through her advocacy and visibility: in a report announcing the formation of the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, Laxmi is named as 'one of the most recognisable faces of *hijras* in India' (IGLHRC 2009).

Laxmi advocates for *hijra* and transgender rights in the same way that Kamla does, but reaches a wider audience, positioned as she is in Mumbai and within global discourses on human rights. While Kamla is concerned with what *kinnars* need in the context of the state of MP, Laxmi attends forums and consultations on all areas of *hijra* and transgender issues that the NGO sector and the Indian State is interested in, for example, taking part in a UNDP National Consultation on HIV related needs and concerns in 2008 (from which the UNDP 'Missing Pieces' Report was compiled) and giving testimony at the Article 39 first public forum on 'transgender issues' in Mumbai in November 2011. She is a highly visible participant and often features in photos at events and consultations she attends; for example, she appears in numerous photos in the UNDP 'Missing Pieces' Report (2008). This form of representation, often as one of the few *hijras* present at consultations, reinforces her position as a representative of the community. At the 2008 UNDP consultation she represented an organisation that she founded that works on issues related to minority sexualities, Astitva, and was one of a few *hijras* present. Additionally, Laxmi has a strong presence, and uses her education, sharp mind, and fluent English to her advantage, which helps her position as an advocate for the *hijra* community more generally. Since she is familiar with both communal (that is, *hijra*) and global discourses, Laxmi is able to position herself as a representative for the community. This is also performed through her image as an 'atypical' *hijra*, for example, when she appeared as a contestant on *Big Boss*, a national television. Before the show, Laxmi told me it would give the public an opportunity to see that *hijras* were 'just like anybody else', and since she has the ability to move easily between a *hijra* world and a non-*hijra* one, she is more 'intelligible' as an individual to the public, as an actor that is more commensurate to the public view of what a *hijra* should be by fitting in with a normative LGBT subject identity.

Laxmi's positioning impacts on how she views the future of the community. She is heavily invested in the fight for LGBT rights (among other struggles), focusing on rights that have been previously ignored by the Indian State and on sex and gender

practice in relation to HIV/AIDS discourses. Laxmi advocates for the equalisation of rights, as well as the need for practices that target the transgender community specifically. On the other hand, there are instances where the *kinnars* of MP, and particularly Kamla Bua, demand equality of rights, with the assumption that there will be added benefits or preferential policies for the *kinnar* community. A difference between the forms of rights demanded can be demonstrated in relation to the issues of caste and reservation, and these are linked concerns. Laxmi is from a Brahmin family in Uttar Pradesh, and Kamla is from the Kori caste, a Scheduled Caste in MP. The distinction between high Brahmin and lower Scheduled Caste status itself might have an impact on the way in which these two individuals see these issues in the first place, as well as the way such rhetoric is produced by subjects and accepted by different audiences. In chapters two and three, I discussed Kamla's efforts to express her chosen 'castelessness', in the face of the petition brought against in the district court, as well as her view that caste should be chosen by *kinnar* individuals. Kamla's efforts to transcend her caste and social status by choosing 'castelessness' remained unrecognised, since the court ruled that castelessness was not an equivalent status to that of being a member of the Scheduled Castes, even though the marginalisation and discrimination that *kinnar* communities face could be comparable to certain Scheduled caste groups. It thus might matter what caste positionality a subject has at the moment of accepted transcendence of caste structures, where Kamla's decision to choose castelessness is interpreted differently from Laxmi's decision to place less significance on her caste (although, she does not reject her caste status, which is not unimportant, given the social status it accrues, and which might offset whatever social deficit *hijra* identity produces for her).

Both have a view of caste that is not reflected more widely in mainstream society. Kamla maintains that there is 'no such thing as caste' in the *kinnar* community, while Laxmi downplays the role of caste among *hijras*. However, caste does matter, particularly in dealings with non-*hijra* society. Kamla ran for a mayoral seat that was reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman. While she may be Kori or from another Scheduled Caste, she maintains that she was given to her *guru* when she was very young (maybe three or four years old) and that her *guru* did not tell her what caste she was, viewed as unimportant because it did not relate to *kinnar* social distinctions. She did not have a caste certificate and had to apply to one at the time of her nomination. I once asked Kamla if she wanted to tell me anything else related to the community or her household. Kamla said this first: that *gurus* should not reveal the caste of a child to them until they are eighteen and that *kinnars* should be allowed to choose their own caste when they were old enough. This is significant, given the way Kamla's own caste was challenged in the Sagar District Court. Caste is important, even if it does not function in a normative sense in *kinnar* society, since it is one form in which *kinnar*

identity is rendered intelligible within mainstream social discourses. Moreover, the State identifies beneficiaries by caste for preferential policies, so having a caste identity is important if individuals want to benefit from preferential schemes, including reservation quotas in politics. By extension, Kamla Bua (and other *kinnars* in MP like Shabnam Mausi)³⁶ believes that reservation should be extended to the *kinnar* community, due to their status as a marginalised group who do not have access to existing benefits. *Kinnar* identity here is equated to a caste identity, where their marginalisation is given as the reason for particular treatment.

In contrast, Laxmi identifies as from a Brahmin family from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, but does not focus on the fact of her caste more than casually stating it. At the same time, it is part of her identity: it links her to her family, with whom she is in close contact, and through the socio-economic benefits associated with her caste, she has been formally educated and has an apartment next to her family in a suburb in Mumbai. These factors are variously linked: her family did not disown her, nor did she leave them, but lives next door to her mother's, but equally makes money from traditional work and her position as a *guru*. However Laxmi's position on reservation is adamant: that reservation should not be extended to cover the *hijra* community and moreover that affirmative action itself is a flawed system of redistribution across India. Her view is consistent with that found among some higher caste individuals in India, since the system primarily rewards members of the lower castes and is seen as non-meritocratic. I do not believe that Laxmi's position is entirely dependent upon her identity as a Brahmin, however, it is a factor when analysing her view. Moreover, Laxmi advocates for the equalisation of rights, that is, that members of the LGBT community receive equal, general rights, and not special rights for specific groups, such as reservation policies for the *hijra* community. This, in turn, would entrench *hijra* identity in the political sphere.

The contrast between the positionality and opinions of Laxmi and Kamla Bua are only one specific example of two disparate views that exist among the *hijra* 'community' and I do not mean to suggest that wider inferences can be drawn from these narratives. Clearly, these are only two possible trajectories based on these two individuals, and two remarkable and visible individuals at that, employed here to underline my general argument that it is problematic to refer to the *hijra* or *kinnar* 'community' as a singular community with identifiable and static needs and agendas. In regard to the question of who speaks for the 'transgenders' in India, or the *hijras* as a 'subset' of transgender identity, listening to certain individuals in the community—while admirable in highlighting needs and wants from the point of view of an 'insider'—might fail to take into account the multiple positionalities within this group,

³⁶ Shabnam Mausi said she filed a petition with the government in Bhopal requesting that *kinnars* be recognised as a separate gender and that reservation policies should be extended to cover them as a subordinate community. She has not received an outcome to her petition.

with the result that certain groups, and their opinions and own interests, remain unrecognised. Arvind Narrain asks the important question of how the LBG community might learn from a 'different' political culture of the *hijras* and *kothis* (and presumably, 'different' sexualities), asking whether sexuality can be a commonality that can overcome the barrier of class (2007: 70). I believe that this question can be extended to ask whether 'class' can be overcome specifically when talking about the *hijra* community and whether those who mediate as representatives between local groups and the State can speak in a way that is representative of different interests, including, significantly, those that are not their own. The issue of representation becomes increasingly problematic if those collated under a particular label such as 'transgender' do not identify with the label itself. I did not meet a single *kinnar* in MP who defined their identity as 'transgender'. Only a couple used the term '*hijra*'. The question of who mediates between a community and the outside world is pertinent: the issue of how the practice of representation functions should be addressed, rather than simply taking membership of a community as a qualification for speaking about that community. Indeed, the discussion of Kamla Bua and Laxmi's viewpoints demonstrates two points: that both fail to agree on certain points of view, such that consensus would be impossible, and, that their position as 'representatives' of their own communities should, in turn, be questioned and complexified; they should not be simply taken as 'representatives', but rather 'representative' of the process of representation. A consideration of 'who speaks' is all the more urgent, given the status of the *hijra* community as one which continues to be subordinate in mainstream society and regarding the contemporary possibility, at the instigation of the State, of redressing their (multiple) grievances. If individuals do not inhabit an identity that is intelligible to and sanctioned by the State, or identify in a way that donors and State agencies can recognise, what happens to those individuals? There is no doubt that important strides have been made towards addressing certain issues, including HIV/AIDS prevention, health access, and rights regarding personal security and social rights. Nonetheless, the categories used to identify beneficiaries are not as extensively representative as might have been intended by policy makers. Through forums and consultation efforts, the Indian State is working to identify subject groups among those who are seen as 'minority sexualities' and establish targeted mechanisms to help previously disregarded communities. At the same time, efforts ensuring the representation of previously marginalised groups, such as the *hijra* 'community', have been shown to be problematic, through the inherent contradictions that are evident in the practice of representation. I have argued that Spivak points to the paradoxical effort in speaking for and as, as both subject and object, representing a subject that appears homogeneous, but in fact is deeply and inconsistently heterogeneous. *Hijra* and *kinnar* identity is being represented as a form of transgender identity, 'flattening out' (Kapur 2009) the

sexual subject so that they are produced and policed through normative constructions of the citizen as a subject of rights. The *hijra* subject is made narrativisable through pre-determined 'modes of interpretation' (Spivak 1990), rendered intelligible and recognisable, at the cost of closing down avenues for heterogeneous and non-narrativisable voices.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, I have explored the practice and experience of representation, specifically considering the ways in which, in both a political proxy and representation sense, it has entailed the necessary normativisation of *kinnar* or *hijra* identity. This process has rendered *hijra* identity intelligible within mainstream discourses, both in politics at various local levels in Madhya Pradesh and through LGBT activism. An investigation into two related but discontinuous forms of representation, as theorised by Spivak, through which a subject speaks ‘for’ and ‘as’, has revealed contradictions inherent in the practice of representation of *kinnars*, particularly the complex positioning of the subject as singular, or at least, homogenous. I have argued, looking at the case of *hijra* subjectivity, that the assumed homogeneity of the subject complicates the practice of representation, since groups—and individuals (given the intricate and individualistic ways in which the *hijra* subject is constructed)—are inherently and discontinuously heterogeneous, taking into account factors including belief, ideology, caste, class, religion, space, sexuality, and life-history. Representation as part of a subject group or as a subject has been demonstrated to affect the reality of that subject and their self-construction, through a study of the *kinnars* of Madhya Pradesh and the space that they inhabit as part of—but not reducible to—the wider *hijra* community and as part of mainstream society. Identity construction is contingent upon and bound up with the practice of representation, by which the subject is made intelligible to State mechanisms and the social imagination.

In each chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how representation and the construction of *kinnar* identity are inherently interlinked. In Chapter One, I discussed how *hijras* have been represented in a variety of spheres, including the literary, gendered, religious, and social, by both *hijras* themselves, in the act of representing their identity as historically and socially significant and legitimating their particular bodies and behaviours in relation to mainstream narratives, and non-*hijras*, who seek to explain the unintelligibility of *hijra* identity through comprehensible discourses. Focusing on *kinnar* identity in MP, I discussed multiple facets of *hijra* identity in order to explore some of the various strands through which the *hijra* subject is configured, much like the ‘subaltern subject-effect’ discussed by Spivak: an operating subject constructed from multiple and variously organised strands which produces the subject of subaltern consciousness (1985: 338). In Chapter Two, I explored the three case studies chosen for this thesis, focusing on how *kinnars* and their campaigners reflected upon these electoral victories. Each *kinnar* was represented as a suitable candidate, who could speak for and as their constituents, fulfilling both senses of the term ‘representation’ I have highlighted. *Kinnars* spoke for their constituents as

representatives who were assumed to be better than professional politicians, and simultaneously spoke as constituents, who were angered by the state of local politics. In Chapters Three and Four, I addressed a more concrete theorisation of both forms of representation, concentrating on how *kinnars* were established as political representatives in the sense of political proxy and how *kinnar* identity was re-presented afresh within the political sphere to demonstrate their suitability as candidates. This re-presentation generated new stereotypes about *kinnar* identity, which served to reinforce widely held narratives about *kinnars* that represented them as impotent and reified their marginality as central to their identities. Using Mansbridge's theorisations on forms of representation (2003), I argued that *kinnars* were only able to act as 'representatives' to their constituents in gyroscopic or anticipatory ways, given general public feeling towards previous politicians, which points to the specific contexts in which each was elected. Moreover, *kinnars* failed to become representatives through a re-presentation in political rhetoric of their identities as 'lacking' and marginal. Ultimately, I argued that representation and political participation was unable to secure lasting material or symbolic benefits for *kinnars* in the political sphere and beyond, using Bourdieu's theorisations on capital to argue that *kinnars'* were unable to convert forms of capital that were intelligible within the *kinnar* community into a different sphere of politics. This inconvertibility of '*kinnar* capital' indicates that there was no framework of intelligibility that bears fidelity to the complex reality of *kinnar* lives, by which to understand and appreciate these three *kinnars'* political participation. In Chapter Five, I attended to the representation of *hijras* as part of the wider LGBT collective in contemporary India, extending the scope of my focus on representation to outside of the sphere of decentralised democracy in Madhya Pradesh. I argued that representation as part of the LGBT movement has normativised a specific version of *hijra* identity, rendering it visible and intelligible to both State and NGO mechanisms. *Hijra* identity has been made narrativisable—effectively homogeneous—through its representation as a form of transgender identity, constructing the *hijra* as an identifiable subject of rights, a practice that already relies upon pre-constructed and sanctioned categories that are intelligible to the State and mainstream society.

There were certain limitations to this study. First, I adopted a case study approach focusing on three individuals and three locations in eastern Madhya Pradesh. This allowed me to draw and analyse comparisons and differences between three cases of *kinnar* elections; however, I was unable to consider other *kinnars'* electoral victories, with their own contextual specificities, including elections in Jabalpur, Bina, Sihora, and Sehore. My approach, however, allowed for an in-depth discussion of these three cases, focusing on specific, local contexts in which three elections occurred, which a study of *kinnar* political participation demanded. Moreover, the possibility of extrapolating wider conclusions based upon the political practice of these particular

localities or the way in which *kinnar* identity came to be manipulated in these spaces is limited, such that the conclusions drawn in this thesis relate to this specific study and to the cases of these three *kinnars*. At the same time, although conclusions may not necessarily be deduced with reference to wider electoral contexts in which previously marginalised community members are elected into local electoral bodies, I suggest that frameworks of conceptualisation and conclusions pertaining to the representation of liminally gendered and socially ostracised individuals could be referred to other contexts in order to structure new approaches and methodologies for consideration. Second, due to limitations of time and resources, I was unable to pursue further research in each locality that would consider more substantially how each electoral victory and *kinnar* identity mobilisation was reflected upon by different electoral communities. Given the substantial distances between localities, I did not have the time to more thoroughly research these areas, in the sense of being able to organise and conduct more interviews with different communities who comprised different electorates, which could have offered different avenues for analysis. This leads to a third limitation: that of language. In certain regards, my access to interviewees was hindered through the presence and use of interpreters, particularly access to language or meaning. At other times, the process was hindered by interpreters themselves, since most lived and worked in each locality and was therefore already enmeshed within a particular local context, which in turn influenced interactions with interviewees. Each of these factors served as limitations for this study and ultimately shaped the findings that I have discussed throughout.

There are several main findings for this thesis, based upon both representation within the field of local politics in MP as indicated by my three case studies and broader assessment of LGBT activism in contemporary India. First, *kinnar* identity was characterised as inherently ‘lacking’. One slogan used generally in *kinnars’* campaigns was ‘you don’t need genitals for politics; you need brains and integrity’ (Reddy 2003: 164). Yet, *kinnars* in MP were represented as not needing anything to contest elections: political experience, formal education, party support, a particular agenda, or even belonging to intelligible social networks. *Kinnars* were not re-presented by belonging to existing social categories in any descriptive sense, which is often required in practices of descriptive representation (Mansbridge 1999). By not standing for anything and not ‘representing’ anything, the identity category ‘*kinnar*’ functioned as an empty signifier, as inherently lacking: not a signifier which pointed to multiple signifieds (although this occurred through voters’ desire to identify *kinnar* identity with their own descriptive positions and comprehensible modes of signification) but a signifier which demonstrated the theoretical possibility of the limits of discursive signification (Laclau 2007: 36). That which was represented by the empty signifier—*kinnar* identity—was ultimately unreachable because it could not be represented adequately (*ibid.*: 40). While

earlier *kinnar* politicians might have filled the signifier with new meaning for ‘later’ *kinnar* politicians (such as Kamla Jaan to Kamla Bua), such that voters could act in an anticipatory manner as theorised by Mansbridge (2003), it was ‘*kinnar*’ identity itself that was conceptualised as lacking. *Kinnars* thus were represented as inherently lacking a sense of identity according to normative social discourses. Yet, positing *kinnar* identity in this way was necessary to render it intelligible for voters through and within mainstream, sanctioned modes of interpretation.

Second, through a focus on ‘lack’ as a core component of *kinnar* identity—in relation to familial and social networks and their identity and gender¹—*kinnars*’ very marginality was brought into political discourse in Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar. Their marginality was maintained at the very moment that *kinnars* sought to attain a central position and role in mainstream society. Reifying *kinnar* marginality was necessary in order to render *kinnar* identity as legible to constituents, framed within normative discourse, and, as a result, their marginality was normativised and made the key facet of their identity. Conceptualising *kinnars* as lacking normative social characteristics served to represent them as ‘outsiders’ in yet another sphere, the sphere of politics, similar to the way they have been conceptualised in other spheres relating to literature, history, gender, and society. This representation reinforced stereotypes relating to the inherent difference of *hijras* from mainstream society. Thus, ‘representation’, instead of securing benefits for *kinnars*, foregrounded their marginality, allowing *hijras* to ‘rule’—echoing Rāma’s prophesy—only once they entered ‘mainstream’ spaces on the terms dictated by non-*hijra* society and after *hijra* identity had been rendered intelligible for such spaces.

Third, representation has ensured that a specific version of *hijra* identity be posited as normative; this has been demonstrated in both the realms of local politics in MP and within LGBT activism. Representation is necessarily normativising because the practice of representation relies on an identifiable subject. Seckinelgin argues that practices relating to the reality of everyday lives need to be ‘translated’ into identities that are ‘politically intelligible’, where the subject, in order to be a political actor, must be understandable within a particular debate or activity (2009: 109). Yet, the articulation of an identity so that it belongs to a pre-established, sanctioned category leads to a ‘flattening out’ of the sexual subject (Kapur 2009: 384), or indeed any subject, in order to be recognised by State mechanisms. In this process, heterogeneous identities and identifications are shut down, so that a homogeneous subject can be identified as the subject of rights.

¹ Although, as has been demonstrated throughout, *kinnars*’ own understanding of their own familial and social networks and gender practice and identity is not conceptualised as ‘lacking’ but such an understanding or positionality is unintelligible within normative modes of interpretation.

Fourth, recognition and representation is only possible through the visibility of the subaltern subject. Spivak points to the contradictions inherent in naming the subaltern, since it is, in part, the non-narrativisable nature of the subaltern that maintains their subalternity (1990: 144). Representation results in subaltern acts being framed within sanctioned 'modes of interpretation' (*ibid.*), erasing the subaltern subject, since they no longer remain, as Spivak writes, at the 'absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic' (1985: 346). Or, according to Laclau, the subject no longer remains within the 'interruption or breakdown of the process of signification' (2007: 37) since it is signification that renders the subject adequately represented. Through representation, *kinnar* or *hijra* identity no longer remained on the discursive limits of signification, since recognition of the subject ensured that a specific figuration of *kinnars* or *hijras* be brought into and rendered intelligible within the sphere of local politics and the sphere of LGBT activism. *Hijras* and *kinnars* were thus made 'visible' subjects, ironically maintaining a position in which they remained both hyper-visible, as the subjects for representation through State and society's mechanisms, and invisible, with respect to the immense heterogeneity of the *hijra* and *kinnar* subject. The normativised *hijra* subject is hyper-visible, at the expense of necessarily rendering heterogeneous forms of that subject (that are not recognised within given modes of interpretation) as invisible.

Representation is thus inherently contradictory and has served on the one hand, to secure benefits for the *hijra* community, and on the other, to necessarily marginalise and render invisible heterogeneous forms of *hijra* identity in modern India. The way forward must be to rethink ways of representation that allow for inclusivity, rather than homogeneity and the closing down of difference. Appreciating both the multiple ways in which subjects are configured and the possibility of unintelligible subjectivities are necessary, in order to maintain heterogeneity within public discourses and state mechanisms that demand simplification. James C. Scott's work points to the necessary role of simplification and legibility in the process of governance. Scott argues that the modern state has trampled over and erased undisciplined forms of knowledge in its demand for legibility through standardisation and uniformity. Legibility is identified by Scott as a central problem in the high-modernist ideology involved in statecraft, which excludes other, more local practices of knowledge (described as 'mētis': knowledge that comes from practical experience that has no claim to universality; 1999: 313, 340). Scott argues that he is not providing a view of uncritical admiration for the local and traditional, nor is he providing an anarchist argument against the state. Rather, the state is defined as 'the vexed institution that grounds both our freedoms and unfreedoms', which must, despite its deeply coercive relationship with its subjects, maintain some elements of the practical knowledges it dismisses (*ibid.*: 7).

The State's techniques for grasping large and complex realities transform details into a set of categories for officials, which is necessary for direct rule. Thus, such simplification inevitably provides a departure from whatever reality such static abstractions are supposed to capture (*ibid.*: 76-7). Scott notes that such simplifications:

can be considered part of an ongoing 'project of legibility,' a project that is never fully realized. The data from which such simplifications arise are, to varying degrees, riddled with inaccuracies, omissions, faulty aggregations, fraud, negligence, political distortion, and so on. A project of legibility is immanent in any statecraft that aims at manipulating society, but it is undermined by intrastate rivalries, technical obstacles, and above all, the resistance of its subjects.

(*ibid.*: 80)

While a project of simplification and standardisation is necessary for direct rule, Scott argues further that the modern state, through its officials, attempts—with varying degrees of success—to create a population with 'standardised characteristics that will be easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage' (*ibid.*: 81-2). Thus legibility does not simply reduce disorder, but also creates the population that it names: categories 'that may have begun as...artificial inventions...can end by becoming categories that organize people's daily experience precisely because they are embedded in state-created institutions that structure that experience' (*ibid.*: 83). The narratability of subjects brings that very subject into being, such as Spivak argues with the subaltern subject and as I have sought to demonstrate through the construction of a form of 'political *kinnar*' identity.

'Any substantial intervention in society', Scott concludes, 'requires the invention of units that are visible' (*ibid.*: 183). However, his discussion of the presence of various local knowledges—indeed, those 'subjugated knowledges' Halberstam investigates (2011)—within techniques of statecraft, call attention to the ways in which the dominant ideology is incomplete, as that which cannot fully grasp the complexity of local situations and subjects. Mansbridge notes that any scheme of representation in which one individual represents many, by inhabiting a particular category, inevitably suppresses difference (2005: 633). Thus, schemes of representation, which are part of a wider project in which subjects are recognised by the state, must acknowledge that there is a separation between representatives and those for whom the representative speaks, a separation between reality and representation (which is simplification). This recognition is necessary in order to avoid essentialism and the silencing of heterogeneity. Moreover, forms of categorisation might not be comprehensible for those collated under such a label given that, as Scott argues, the creation of visible, legible categories to the state may be at odds with the complex lived realities of social beings. Giving people the autonomy to identify through different modes and frameworks of reference, perhaps drawing upon 'subjugated', local forms of knowledge, can be more beneficial than forcing them to adopt a particular, pre-

established identity. This autonomy might add to the resistance of subjects and can undermine the project of statecraft, if Scott is right, recalling the subversive potential in any subject's unstable identity, as theorised by Butler. Paul Boyce provides an example of the use of local knowledges in relation to the dominant modes of identification among certain same-sex subjects in India. He argues that an approach in the petition against Section 377, regarding the right to privacy for consensual same-sex sexual relations, allowed people to determine 'their sexual preference and identity' instead of making people identify in a way that may have been 'inimical' to many subjects, even though it would afford identity-based, constitutional protections (2006: 96). Since identification as a 'gay' or 'queer' subject was unintelligible to many people, the approach in the petition focused on the question of rights for same-sex sexual subjects and simultaneously acknowledged the limits of categories that individuals would not find meaningful. A theorisation of representation should thus concede that there are discrepancies, both in the separation between the representative and the represented, which is part of the coercive project of statecraft in forming legible subjects, and in the use of categories that may fail to be comprehensible and meaningful to subjects. Thus the potential for heterogeneity and the unintelligible forms of subjectivity formed in the 'moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences' (Bhabha 1994: 1-2) can be maintained within public discourses that demand identities be articulated in a simple and intelligible way. Bhabha notes that what is 'theoretically innovative and politically crucial' is developing narratives beyond original subjectivities, demanding that we investigate the processes, the in-between spaces, in which self-hood is configured and knotted together from various strands, histories, and spaces. If subjectivities are formed at the intersections of modes of interpretation, at the very limits 'where history is narrativized into logic' (Spivak 1985: 346), it is crucial to recognise the possibilities for new configurations of subjectivity and the constant limitations of categories and modes of intelligibility, particularly those which form part of the machinery of the modern state. Recognising the limitations of both categories and the act of representation can allow subjects to determine their identities and preferences in ways that are more meaningful and intelligible to them whilst still recognising them as the bearer of rights.

I want to end with a note on heterogeneity and representation. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Laxmi had just taken me to a *badhāt* ceremony and we were driving towards a meeting in another affluent suburb in Mumbai where she was going to sign the contract for her appearance on the nationally televised, new Big Boss season. She explained she was going on the popular programme to reveal to audiences across India that *hijras* were just like 'normal people'. 'But what is normal?', I asked. She thought for a minute. She turned to me and said, 'but who am I? I am different people for different purposes. These are all just representations; these are all just faces'. An

acknowledgement of the act of representation in constructing one's identity seems like an appropriate way to end this thesis. Perhaps more subtle, but no less self-conscious, was a moment following an interview with Kamla Bua. We had spoken for about an hour in the back chamber of her office whilst several men waited for her advice or clearance on Corporation business. We spoke about the world in which she usually lived. Speaking about regional gatherings, Kamla had invited me, again, to attend the *sammelan* she was organising. She was relaxed and happy, animatedly speaking about the event and her excitement. We stood up to leave, waiting for Kamla. She got ready to return, straightening her clothes and composing herself. She paused, looked down, and took a deep breath. Then, with her head raised, she walked out into the Mayoral office, resuming her position as the Mayor of Sagar city.

Appendix A:
Heera Bai, Ward Corporator, Jabalpur, 2000-2004

Heera Bai was elected as the Corporator for Ravindranath Tagore ward in the City of Jabalpur in the December 1999 elections. She was sworn into the Municipal Corporation in January 2000 and served the full term until the end of 1994. I met and interviewed Heera Bai several times in Jabalpur. The interviews were conducted at her home in Ravindranath Tagore ward, one of the poorer wards in the city. The first time I met Heera, she was adamant that she would not speak about her personal life, but only her political experiences. On later occasions she spoke more freely, explaining about her household, the *kinnar* community in MP, and issues that were of importance to her and other *kinnars*.

Mr Sharm Bhatt, President of the Jabalpur Municipal Corporation, knew Heera Bai and made an appointment for us to visit her. We drove on his motorbike to a group of houses set back from the main road in one of the poorer and more underdeveloped wards. Heera Bai appeared from one of the houses, wearing a white cotton kurta, pajama trousers, a black and white scarf, and sunglasses. She told Mr Bhatt that we should follow her to her home and hopped onto her own motorbike. We drove a short distance to her house, parking at the end of the lane, which led up towards the tall blue house. We climbed the stairs to get to the front door, which was open. In front of the house was an open patch of land, on which several goats were grazing. A *kinnar* squatted on the front steps, watching the goats and cleaning vegetables. We entered the house and sat down next to the door with our backs to the wall. Heera sat opposite us, so she could look out of the door. There were stairs immediately next to me leading to an upstairs floor. There was a much larger room next to the one we were in, raised by one step, which was fairly empty apart from a television, and another room off that, forming an L-shape. Heera speaks some English and is evidently smart and quick-witted. She finished her tenth grade of education, marking her out among *kinnars* as having attended formal education until she was 16. By Heera's estimation, there are around 350 *kinnars* in Jabalpur, based in two localities in the city.¹

Heera is the head of her household and one of the most well known *kinnars* in the city. She is regarded favourably by the local population for her behaviour and mannerisms. Heera said that people who enter politics think that they should contest elections because they believe it is the right thing to do. Heera might have felt this way, but her victory was down to the support of her ward. Interviewees spoke about her good behaviour, saying that she endeared herself to the public through her nature and that had a good reputation before she contested her seat (Bhatt Interview, 22/1/11;

¹ These localities are Uttar Milloniganj, near Khusera Masjid, and Mahaśi Ravindwar; both localities are Scheduled Caste wards.

Godbole Interview, 15/2/11; Bhanot Interview, 16/2/11). She was well-known and popular among women in the ward, which was important given nearly equal voting rates between men and women (Bhatt Interview, 22/1/11). Similar to Katni, Shahdol, and Sagar, voters wanted to see her contest the election, especially as an independent candidate. Sadanand Godbole, the opposition leader of the BJP in the Municipal Corporation² speculated that the public disliked both the BJP and Congress candidates and, as a result, gave Heera a chance (Interview, 15/2/11; see Saxena Interview, 16/2/11). He noted that the voters might have supported her candidacy because Heera did not behave like 'those other third persons who usually act the way they do' (*ibid.*), alluding to behaviour seen as typically *kinnar*.³ Mrs Godbole, who also served as a ward corporator for Vivekanand ward, suggested that Heera impressed her constituents, in spite of being a *kinnar*. Ravindranath Tagore ward was described by several interviewees as a 'slum' area, with people with low literacy rates (although this was a description given by middle class people who were involved with the Municipal Corporation who did not live in the ward).⁴ Mr Godbole surmised that constituents may have disliked the nominated BJP and Congress candidates because they were not truly 'representative', in the sense of sharing common experiences and livelihoods, whereas the voters wanted someone to actually represent them, who knew them and '[could] express their problems to the government exactly' (*ibid.*; Shah Interview, 18/2/11). Tarun Bhanot, a Congress member of the Mayor-in-Council (1999-2004), disagreed with this assessment, saying that it was the media that sensationalised the election of a *kinnar* and played up the factor of disillusion with mainstream parties (Interview, 16/2/11). He said he did not agree with the explanation that voters were disillusioned with BJP and Congress candidates because, as he argued, people were elected from 'all aspects of life', from all political parties, and while some people might have interpreted *kinnars'* elections as a sign of disillusion with mainstream political parties, it was only a few cases where these elections occurred and mainstream politicians lost. As he put it, Congress candidates lost in other wards as well, and BJP candidates lost in others, so it was not the case that independent candidates won every

² Mr Vishwanath (V.N.) Dubey won the December 1999 direct mayoral election. He was a member of Congress, but the BJP held the majority in the Jabalpur Municipal Corporation from 1999-2004 (with 37 ward corporators belonging to the BJP). In 2004, Mr Dubey was nominated by the Congress Party to contest the Member of Parliament elections, but was defeated. When he lost, he resigned his mayorship, in early 2004. Mr Godbole was nominated from among the corporators as the new mayor and sworn in as mayor on 6 June 2004.

³ Although Heera might not have behaved as a typical *kinnar*, one interviewee described the 'factor of fear' as an additional reason that secured her election. He said that some people were scared of being cursed by her; the 'fear factor' also aided her work while in office (Saxena Interview, 16/2/11).

⁴ I was told that there were 150 or so brothels ('*koṭhā*') near Khusera Masjid (where the *kinnars* lived), where men are entertained by 'singers' and 'dancers' (the 'profession' of many women in that area since Jabalpur has no license for prostitution; they are known as '*koṭhevālī*'). Mr Bhatt described the area we had been as a 'slum area', saying that *kinnar* households are scattered throughout the area. He said categorically that no *kinnars* are involved in this business, but later said that if they were involved, it was not declared openly (Interview, 22/1/11).

seat in that election, which would have sent a very clear message to both BJP and Congress that their politicians were rejected. Yet, it seems apparent that frustration played a role, particularly in Heera Bai's election in this particular ward, given that other politicians and journalists attribute her victory as a sign of anger with nominated candidates and to teach a lesson to mainstream political parties (Bhatt Interview, 22/1/11; Godbole Interview, 15/2/11; Saxena Interview, 16/2/11; Shah Interview, 18/2/11; Kohli Interview, 18/2/11). Vinay Saxena, a current Congress corporator and during the time of Heera's tenure, stated that Heera's election revealed to both parties that their candidates were incompetent by selecting a 'third gender', an alternative choice (Interview, 16/2/11). The Mayor of the Municipal Corporation from 1999-2004, Vishwanath Dubey, elaborated on the reason for the anger of local voters: he said that there was a lot of dissatisfaction with politicians because the Corporation did not extend many services to Ravindranath Tagore ward, since hardly anyone was a taxpayer due to the poor and lower socio-economic status of the ward residents. As a result, both the problems and the request for investment were 'enormous', leading to dissatisfaction (Interview, 16/2/11). Both BJP and Congress 'failed', by being unable to satisfy public demands. He argued that the 'climate' was set for a 'third alternative' and that her initial campaigners understood the political situation and created the context in which she could win. In fact, as Mr Dubey argued, it should not be understood that 'a *kinnar*' won there but it just happened that Heera Bai was a *kinnar*: it was negative voting against other parties rather than positive voting for Heera Bai. Other leaders were said to have lost their credibility so that a new leadership emerged, and Heera just happened to be a *kinnar*. It was a normal election, Mr Dubey stated, but the fact that Heera was a *kinnar* inevitably made her victory exciting news. If she had not been a *kinnar*, people may have been indifferent to the result of the election of an independent candidate, as with any other election in which BJP and Congress candidates did not win (*ibid.*).

During the election campaign, Heera Bai was actively courted by the media for interviews and her campaign made public throughout Jabalpur. Given that electronic media was the very latest technology, candidates attempted to spread news of their campaigns as widely as possible (Shah Interview, 18/2/11; Kohli Interview, 18/2/11). Digi Cable News Chief Editor, Pankaj Shah, pointed out that candidates were as interested in publicising themselves as the media was in finding out about them. They were even more interested in Heera's case because her campaign was a 'very unique matter', as one of the first *kinnars* to campaign in Madhya Pradesh (Interview, 18/2/11). Support was generated quickly among the residents in Heera's ward, a form of support based on 'address', rather than party affiliation, interviewees suggested (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11; Shah Interview, 18/2/11). Her campaign was different to that of party candidates: she went door to door asking for votes. While this method

was not specific to *kinnars*, Mr Shah noted that the style of going door to door was different, according to 'their habit and nature' (Interview, 18/2/11). Their way of publicity drew upon their style of traditional work, asking for the vote but also dancing and singing in groups of *kinnars*. He noted that the public enjoyed Heera's approach of dancing, singing, and playing instruments, especially noting the use of some beautiful *kinnars* who appealed to male voters (*ibid.*). There were no specific slogans associated with Heera's campaign: her campaign, unlike the other three *kinnars*' campaigns discussed for the thesis, only had to appeal to the constituents of her ward. Unlike Kamla Jaan, Kamla Bua, and Shabnam Mausí's elections, which had to be far-reaching and appeal to numerous groups and their individual interests across larger geographical areas and numerical numbers, Heera Bai's campaign was limited to Ravindranath Tagore ward. Interviewees highlighted the numerous problems in the ward relating to a lack of development (such as electricity, sanitation, and infrastructure). It was crucial that Heera could appeal to constituents by being able to represent their interests in the Municipal Corporation as a corporator, especially by portraying other candidates as 'unrepresentative' of the ward and constituents. Heera was represented as better placed to understand constituents' problems as they themselves saw them (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11). While campaigning were important, Heera was already represented as someone who understood what it was to belong to and live in the ward, and had a good reputation and standing with her potential constituents. One story that was adopted was the myth in which Lord Rāma gives a boon to *kinnars* that future generations will rule. Although people 'did not believe' the story (Shah Interview, 18/2/11; Kohli interview, 18/2/11), it was used to attract voters towards supporting Heera's campaign, where she was represented as fulfilling the prophesy of *kinnar* rule. While the myth was an important rhetorical allusion that helped her campaign, journalist Mr Kohli noted that people only focused on the factor of development (Interview, 18/2/11), and Heera primarily was represented as committed to developing her ward and knowing what needed to be done.

The election results were announced in January 2000 and Heera Bai began her role, representing her ward at monthly municipal meetings and allocating the funds that were set aside for the development of her ward.⁵ Both Heera and fellow politicians judged her tenure to be fairly successful, as she was able to complete many projects in her ward with the financial quota that had be set aside for the ward's development.

⁵ Heera also contested a Member of the Legislative Assembly seat for Jabalpur (one of five seats) when the incumbent BJP MLA passed away, but lost to his wife. Ex-corporator Tarun Bhanot gave one reason for her defeat as a lack of party backing. He explained that representing a ward is very different from a constituency, for example, the ward she represented, he speculated, only had around 8,000 to 10,000 people registered to vote, whereas the assembly election constituency is anywhere between 1.8 to 2.5 lakhs. Thus, anyone would need party backing, public relations, and to be well known throughout the whole constituency in order to successfully contest the election.

Heera provided a list of projects she had undertaken, including the installation of twenty five hand pumps for water, covering fourteen roads with concrete, ensuring ration cards were given to thousands of individuals and securing pensions for widows, and buying cows to provide milk for the poor without cost (Interview, 26/1/11).⁶ She was an active corporator and other interviewees suggested she had managed to undertake important development work. However, she was criticised for doing the work that was needed but no extra: for example, securing extra funds from different budgets in order to undertake more development work (Kohli Interview, 18/2/11). Arguably there were limits to her ability to attain extra funds, such as a lack of party support as an independent candidate⁷ and, as an individual with no political experience, she had no one to give her advice. While a corporator's job is fairly simple, it is time-consuming and there is a lot of work to be done, such as meeting constituents and addressing their grievances and planning and completing development works. Ex-mayor Mr Dubey stated that it was 'a superhuman task' to satisfy everyone and that nobody could do justice to the job (Interview, 16/2/11). The task was magnified, he said, when corporators did not have staff, support, or even an office. He said that Heera, despite her activity and intentions and social position as a *kinnar* leader, was less affluent and politically inexperienced. He noted that often people in this situation—with little political experience—are helped by people who can take advantage of their position in order to benefit themselves, and believed that Heera too was 'exploited' in this way.

Heera's behaviour in office was perceived favourably on the whole, and she changed aspects of her personality and behaviour to suit her political role. Corporator Tarun Bhanot said that she was composed from the beginning, but it took several months for everyone else to get used to her behaviour and presence (Interview, 16/2/11). After that, he stated, 'she was just like any of us'. Her dignity during her tenure was mentioned frequently: ex-mayor V. N. Dubey particularly recalled her dignity in the following story. After he was elected mayor, he was about to announce his Mayor-in-Council (MIC). Heera Bai came to him dressed up 'nicely and very decently' and thanked him for inducting her into the MIC, even though he had no intention of doing so. Mr Dubey said that one of her supporters had told her this story

⁶ Testifying to her desire to benefit the constituents of her ward, ex-mayor Mr Dubey told a story in which Heera got him to sanction an illegal pipeline to supply water to the ward. He noted that there were many illegal water connections in Jabalpur, in which someone could connect their pipe to the mains and take water whenever they wanted, which was an illegal practice. Heera wanted to buy a pipeline with corporation money and undertake the job with corporation labour, not realising that the act was illegal. He said he saw the matter like this: the illegality of the act was probably not important to Heera, but what mattered was to ensure a supply of water. He decided he could not explain the constitutionality or legality of the situation, so sanctioned it so that she could help her ward residents, taking the blame since he was the one who was doing something illegal (Interview, 16/2/11).

⁷ Among the corporators elected during 1999-2004, Heera was the only independent candidate (without affiliation to a political party), and there was one corporator representing the Bahujan Samaj Party and one representing the Shiv Sena (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11).

to make a fool of her, and that this person was a 'mischief monger'. He had to tell her that it was not his intention and that he couldn't do it, but 'she accepted it gratefully' so that he could see intelligence, grace, and dignity in this act (Interview, 16/2/11). People treated her with respect due to her decent behaviour and due to her role as an elected corporator, but no one treated her with 'more respect than what was required', Mr Dubey noted, in the sense that they were too supportive, or patronising (*ibid.*).

Journalist Pankaj Shah stated that she was not a politician before the election but only a very famous *kinnar*, but 'she looked like a politician after the election' (Interview, 18/2/11). Her identity as a *kinnar* and her good reputation, alongside her 'activities, look, and personality' endeared her to her constituents (*ibid.*). However, her identity as a *kinnar* had both positive and negative aspects. If she wanted a job done, people had to listen, because 'if she became brash', nobody knew how to handle her and were scared of her (Dubey Interview, 16/2/11; Kohli Interview, 18/2/11). She was 'street-wise', certainly more so than other members of the Municipal Corporation, and they wanted to avoid arguments and unnecessary clashes with Heera. Mr Dubey interpreted this as advantageous: 'it was an advantage... [people] would rather do the job than face her wrath' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, her identity as a *kinnar*, even though she did not misbehave with anyone (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11) and acted in a composed manner (Bhanot Interview, 16/2/11), meant that she was not taken seriously. Ex-mayor Sadanand Godbole said that she was taken as a 'laughing-stock' by many and was not paid proper attention or sincerity, even though she always raised her voice on behalf of her constituency and presented herself and her points confidently (Interview, 15/2/11). People treated her as a *kinnar*: Mr Godbole explained this meant people did not see *kinnars* as common people and did not consider them as having a good reputation or equal standing in society, thus she was not respected or given the same chance afforded a non-*kinnar* person. Moreover, she was an independent, which made it more difficult for her to get her work done. Her identity as a *kinnar* may have made people reluctant to deal with her, or treat her badly, but interviewees also allude to Heera deliberately taking advantage of her identity as a *kinnar*, which reinforced stereotypes about *kinnar* behaviour in the political arena. One interviewee said that she would sometimes create a disturbance over specific issues in public meetings. This sort of nuisance gained media coverage, since she always protested against the establishment and this made for interesting news for the public, especially on local television channels (Shah Interview, 18/2/11). The presence of the media might have generated this behaviour and vice versa, so that attention would be focused on Heera Bai in meetings. Mr Shah noted that Heera Bai would often clap to protest an idea, which stood out from 'normal' behaviour among politicians, even though he stated that these actions were in accordance 'with her nature' (*ibid.*; Godbole Interview 15/2/11). At the same time, Heera Bai was said to have spent time on her

appearance and behaviour during her tenure, acting in a way a commendable way and being courteous to all (Shah Interview, 18/2/11). This behaviour was not different from her behaviour before her election, which was presumably the basis for her good reputation. However, she did not change her behaviour, increasing in dignity, literacy, or presentation (*ibid.*), and thus, as her tenure went on, there was diminished interest in her presence in the Municipal Corporation.

Due to Heera's identity as a *kinnar*, there were certain negative stereotypes assumed to belong to her identity that were developed during her time in office, similar to the stereotypes generated as a result of Kamla Jaan, Shabnam Mausi, and Kamla Bua's tenures, that reinforced assumptions about *kinnar* identity. While several ex- or current politicians assessed her work as competent, Journalist Pankaj Shah noted that as time went on, there was less and less interest in Heera and her work, as the public found that she did not achieve very much. She was perceived as not particularly competent and her tenure seen as 'unsuccessful' (Interview, 18/2/11), despite managing to complete development works in her ward and maintaining a generally favourable reputation. In Mr Shah's assessment, Heera's 'capability' was not satisfactory and he said that the public were not satisfied with her work, and welcomed the next election of the Congress candidate. His assessment is based on the fact that she did not do extra work in her ward, but only used the amount that was already allotted for each corporator, according to the demands of their ward. He concluded by saying that 'by no definition' could he say that Heera Bai was a success in politics, compared, for example, to Bharat Gangoria, the next corporator for Ravindranath Tagore ward. Journalist Mr Kohli agreed with Mr Shah, adding, 'I'll tell you one thing: *kinnars* are not politicians. You cannot compare [them] to other politicians'. He stated that many other politicians 'have it in their blood', or are part of a political family (Shah Interview, 18/2/11). In contrast, Heera lacked an identity, or status, as a politician (Bhanot Interview, 16/2/11). Instead, she was identified as a *kinnar*, and being a *kinnar* meant that people assumed she could not work properly, or did not treat her fairly, despite attending every meeting and trying to work with everyone (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11). Yet, her independent status—as a *kinnar* and without party backing—meant that she could not work with either the BJP or Congress in the interests of the city but was only focused on the problems of her ward (*ibid.*). Neither majority party tried to adopt Heera Bai and get her to join them, nor did she try to join them (*ibid.*; Bhanot Interview, 16/2/11), although Heera told me that both parties asked her to join them (Interview, 22/1/11).

Heera completed her tenure and was successful in completing development works for her ward and in attending and participating in the daily workings of the corporation. In the 2004 election, the Ravindranath Tagore ward seat was reserved for the general category. Heera Bai intended to fight the election, but said she withdrew in

the end to support the Congress candidate, Bharat Gangoria (Interview, 26/1/11). Mr Gangoria was said to have had a lot of influence in the ward 'in all spheres of power, including money, men, muscle power: he had everything' (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11); an assessment that reflects the importance of convertible capital in rendering an individual intelligible and commanding in a new sphere. There seems to be a positive impression of her time in office in terms of her overall behaviour, mannerisms, and appearance (Shah Interview, 18/2/11; Godbole Interview, 15/2/11; Bhanot Interview, 16/2/11). Mr Bhanot went on to say that he felt his opinion of Heera Bai and *kinnars* more generally changed a lot after being in touch with her and working with her. She proved, despite being a member of a group that society do not see as 'regular', that she could maintain her dignity and manage herself in the political arena in Jabalpur (Interview, 16/2/11). Although attitudes may have changed such that Heera Bai entered local politics and completed her tenure, she has been unable to contest another election and has returned to her traditional work; Mr Dubey assessed that essentially attitudes will return to what they were before, based on negative stereotypes of *kinnars*. Political participation was only a temporary distraction that had some positive rewards for one ward in Jabalpur, but *kinnars* retain the same position they held in the social imagination, primarily as 'singers' and 'dancers' (Kohli Interview, 18/2/11). There did not seem to be a future expectation that a *kinnar* will return to politics, given that Heera Bai was not seen as particularly successful, it is unlikely she, or other *kinnars*, would be given another chance, unless the conditions were right, such as disillusion with mainstream parties or the nomination of improper candidates (*ibid.*, Godbole Interview, 15/2/11). However, during our interviews, Heera said she was considering contesting the MLA seat from the western constituency in Jabalpur (scheduled to take place in December 2013). She expressed that if she did fight it would be as an independent candidate. Heera also said she might contest the 2014 Member of Lok Sabha (Lower House of National Parliament) election but would have to wait to find out the reservations on particular seats.⁸ Heera expressed her ambition to stay in politics by saying she would run for these seats, saying that politics had become a business to her. Yet, according to local journalists, Heera has not kept up her social work or presence (Kohli Interview, 18/2/11; Shah Interview, 18/2/11), which was necessary to contest future elections. While she has returned to her traditional work, Heera has remained active in regard to *kinnar* issues, particularly discussing the imposition of the census category 'other' on *kinnars'* gender, instead of allowing them to choose the designation 'male' or 'female' (Interview, 10/4/11). Identifying as a

⁸ Reservations are declared before the elections are announced, so Heera would have to wait to decide which seat to contest. Heera Bai can contest seats reserved for women, since she is entered on the electoral roll as a woman (Interview, 22/1/11). Generally, there was some confusion among interviewees as to which category *kinnars* can contest: they suggested that *kinnars* could contest both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe seats because 'they are very much in the minority' (Godbole Interview, 15/2/11; Bhatt Interview, 22/1/11).

woman, Heera demanded that 'we are also human' and should be put in the women's category. She expressed anger at the 'other' category, saying that 'three crores' (thirty million) *kinnars* were put in this category but want to be in the female category. While this number may be exaggerated, Heera wanted to indicate the seriousness and scale of the problem of designating *kinnars* as an 'other' gender, given that *kinnars* have their own gender presentations and preferences, and are allowed to identify and are recognised by the state as women elsewhere. She said that they all think of themselves as women, and it is very upsetting to be counted as 'other': she did not understand why this choice existed at all. Heera and Kamla Bua attended a meeting in Bhopal with the election commission in March 2011, asking them to take the matter to the central government. They boycotted the census counting, along with hundreds of other *kinnars* who, as Heera said, also 'understood the importance' of the boycott. However, the counting had already happened and despite Heera believing that the government would respond to their demands, *kinnars* were counted as an 'other' gender, perhaps with many hundreds or thousands across the country protesting that designation and remaining uncounted, like Heera Bai and Kamla Bua. More distressingly, on the Provisional Population Totals Papers available online from the 2011 Census website, 'others' have been counted alongside 'males' for working out national and state population, gender ratios, and literacy rates, among other rates and ratios relating to age. *Kinnars* thus remain categorised as male, despite Heera's insistence that they be categorised as female.

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